

THE TRUE VOICE OF FEELING

*Studies in
English Romantic Poetry*

by

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Introduction

My intention in the first part of this volume is to trace the discovery and evolution of ‘organic form’ in English poetry. What I mean by organic form will, I hope, soon emerge. I believe it to be the specific form of modern poetry, in so far as this poetry is specifically modern. But I would like to suggest that what is specifically modern about our poetry is not the form as such, but rather a realization that form is the natural effect of the poet’s integrity. So what we are to be concerned with is not so much ‘the life of forms’, to use the phrase of a French art historian (Henri Focillon), but rather the form of life. From the beginning of the modern period in English poetry, which for practical purposes we may take as the year 1798, it has been a question, not of adopting this or that form of composition, but of believing enough in what one feels (the phrase is Yeats’s) and of knowing and expressing the feeling accurately.

Sincerity is not, of course, a modern prerogative; nor, indeed, is organic form in poetry. But I assume that in so far as the poetry of the past is sincere, to that extent it is organic in form. The evolution of Shakespeare’s poetic technique is to be interpreted in this sense. But I do not assume that all good poetry is necessarily organic in form; nor that all good poets are necessarily sincere. There is another alternative and defensible attitude in literature, and in life. We might call it sophistry. The word ‘sophist’ is now a term of abuse, but originally it denoted a perfectly respectable type of philosopher. The sophist was a philosopher who did not claim to know the truth—he did not believe that it was knowable; but he was

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prepared to play a game of wits with binding rules, and to construct a whole system of formal knowledge, self-consistent, beautiful to contemplate, satisfying as a logical structure. Closely related to the sophist was the rhetor, and a literature parallel to sophistry grew up in ancient times and came to Europe with the Revival of Learning. Rhetoric is literature conceived as a game, and to conform to the rules of the game a writer must use and elaborate certain fixed forms, with the object of exhibiting his skill. There was never any question of faithfully expressing the rhetor's feelings, never any question of sincerity. Poetry was treated as a literary game, as it still is, for example, in the Welsh *eisteddfod* and in the competition columns of our weekly reviews.

✓ I begin, therefore, by assuming a radical distinction between the rhetorical forms of poetry and what I would call the natural or organic forms of poetry; (and I believe that it was not merely a new phase of literature that began with the Romantic Movement in Europe, but a new and immensely more vital and interesting conception of literature itself. Poetry ceased to be a game; it became a mode of apprehension, an effort of consciousness.) We may regret that sonnets, like wigs, have gone out of fashion, and if worn as fancy-dress only serve to disguise our feelings. The ideal is now, both in clothes and poetry, to dress as inconspicuously as possible.

The first part of this book was prepared as material for a seminar at Princeton University in the Fall of 1951, and I would like to express my sense of the stimulus and encouragement I derived from the discussions that then took place; and in particular my indebtedness to Mr Francis Fergusson, who acted as convener. The second part of the book, though not so deliberately planned, consists of essays which touch the same theme, and I hope throw additional light on it. One of them, 'In Defence of Shelley', was published as the title essay of a

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volume issued in 1936, but has long been out of print; I have revised it for the present volume. Another, on 'Coleridge as Critic', was originally delivered as a lecture at Johns Hopkins University and published separately in 1949. 'Wordsworth's Philosophical Faith' was delivered as a Centenary address at the University of Leeds in 1950, and the 'Byron essay' was written for the British Council and published by them as a supplement to the *British Book News* in 1951.

- It is now twenty years since I first outlined the general theme of this volume in an essay entitled *Form in Modern Poetry*, and even now I do not feel that I have exhausted it. I am again concerned, not with what is dead and gone, but with the present reality of poetic creation—with a literary movement that is still active after a century and a half; and as a poet I am aware that my criticism suffers from the suspicion of being written in self-defence.

H. R.

PART ONE

THE MAIN THEME

CHAPTER I

The Notion of Organic Form: Coleridge

So he is: so he writes.

COLERIDGE

[i]

Romanticism was, and is, a universal phenomenon. The particular phase we are going to examine here was first given philosophical definition in Germany, but it would be easy to prove that the German critics and philosophers, the two Schlegels and Schelling, based themselves on poets like Goethe and Schiller, and that these poets, who were themselves no mean philosophers and critics, in their turn looked back to the practice of poets like Homer and Shakespeare. Romanticism is as old as art itself, but what we are to be concerned with in these pages, and to identify as the vital element in romanticism, is a consciously recognized principle of organic form and the effect which the recognition of this principle has had on the subsequent development of English poetry.

In England the principle itself was first clearly formulated by Coleridge, but in his formulation Coleridge relied directly on Schelling, whose *Transcendental Idealism* had been published in 1804 and had coloured all his thoughts. But the basic text for our discussion is Schelling's lecture 'On the Relation of the Plastic Arts to Nature', delivered in Munich in 1807, which Coleridge possessed in an edition

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of Schelling's *Philosophische Schriften* published at Landshut
in 1809.¹

✓ The principle of organic form, the specifically romantic principle as I shall call it, rests on one of the most fundamental distinctions known to philosophy—variously expressed as the distinction between essence and existence, universals and particulars, *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*.[✓] The point at issue is not the recognition or differentiation of these two aspects of reality, but the possibility of mediating between them. How does man, a mere specimen of *natura naturata*, become aware of and make evident the process of *natura naturans*, the realm of essence? It is done, said Schelling, through the medium of art—art is the active bond between the soul and nature, between essence and existence. The work of art is the visible embodiment of the nature of being. Art is not a mere imitation of existing phenomena—it is 'the holy, eternally creative elemental power of the world, which generates all things out of itself and brings them forth productive'.[✓]

✓ Such a creative power is not arbitrary. The very word 'creative'—the German word used by Schelling is 'bildenden', from 'bilden', to form, to shape, to fashion—implies a practical activity. But before the argument can proceed we have to accept one of the main axioms of the transcendental philosophy, namely, that the realm of essence is a realm of perfection. The logician might say that this is merely a tautological statement; for what is posited as universal, eternal, invariable, can have no accidental particulars that might give rise to imperfection: what *is*, is perfect.

✓ This point is important because the romantic principle asserts that form is an organic event, proceeding from the intui-

¹ A translation, by A. Johnson, under the title *The Philosophy of Art: an Oration on the Relation between the Plastic Arts and Nature*, was published in 1845 (London: John Chapman). In view of the significance of this statement for our whole discussion, a new translation by Michael Bullock is given as an Appendix (see page 321).

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tive experience of the artist. The form is realized by the artist in the act of intuition: in the moment of his penetration of the veil of appearances that separates man from the realm of essence. Such a spontaneously emergent *form* must be sharply distinguished from a superinduced *shape*. A shape is something pre-existent, belonging to the realm of existence, and essence can be only deformed by being forced into such a ready-made container. Our practical faculties, that is to say, cannot consciously predetermine the form that will fitly express an intuitive experience. Form belongs to the realm of essence and is abstracted from it by the mediating genius of the artist—genius, in this sense, being not the artist himself, but an unconscious power which he possesses (or which possesses him) and which enables him for a moment to identify himself with the formative energy of the universe, with *natura naturans*. But essence, as Schelling says in an illuminating phrase, always outgrows form: form is never final.

Let us ask ourselves at the outset of this enquiry: are we in the realm of metaphysical speculations, of merely idealistic distinctions? Is this fundamental distinction of Schelling's one for which there is empirical evidence, and one on which we can base a criticism of poetry? Coleridge himself had no doubt about the possibility. I think we can show that all his major critical decisions are based on the application of this general principle; and that his own practice as a poet was, first, a vivid proof of the principle in his own experience, and then a measure of the vanity of his endeavour to recover the power of an elusive faculty.¹

No one who has studied Coleridge's writings closely can fail to realize that the general distinction between conscious and unconscious modes of thought, which we are so apt to regard as a discovery of modern psychology, was already

¹ I discuss his general application of the principle in a separate chapter (see below, page 157).

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fully realized by the poet. There is a paragraph in the lecture 'On Poesy or Art' (*Biog. Lit.*, II, 258–9) that makes this so clear that we must give it our close attention before we proceed. Let it be freely admitted that Coleridge took the distinction from Schelling, and that his words are often a paraphrase of Schelling's original text¹; but when Coleridge writes he tests Schelling's theories against his own poetic experience, and that gives a vivid reality, if not a vital originality, to the whole passage:

✓ In every work of art there is a reconciliation of the external with the internal . . .

This is a general description of the dialectical process—many such formulations appear in Coleridge's work, and are a commonplace of the philosophy of the period. The next part of the sentence, however, is more than an illustration of a general principle:

✓ ' . . . the conscious is so impressed on the unconscious as to appear in it'. [This means, I think, that the objects of perception are fused in all their primal vividness into the neural structure of the brain, where they remain unconsciously latent.] 'He who combines the two [the conscious and the unconscious] is the man of genius; and for that reason he must partake of both. Hence there is in genius itself an unconscious activity; nay, that is the genius of the man of genius.' ✓

✓ This is a little more specific than Schelling's statement, which sees in the best works of art a combination of conscious activity (*Thätigkeit*) and unconscious force (*Kraft*). The question is: to what extent are the images of perception significantly recombined in the unconscious? Schelling says they

¹ The passage most in question is to be found on pages 300–1 of *Samt. Werke*, 1 Abth., 7. Compare the translation on page 331 below, the paragraph beginning: 'It has long been perceived that not everything in art is the outcome of consciousness . . .'

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are recovered 'mit tausendfältigem Wucher', with vastly accrued interest. Some enhanced vitality is given to the artist's perceptions by the Life Force, the Naturgeist. Coleridge says that the artist absents himself for a season from nature in order that 'his own spirit, which has the same ground with nature, may learn her unspoken language in its main radicals, before he approaches to her endless compositions of them'. And then comes the most significant statement of what I call the romantic principle:

'Yes, not to acquire cold notions—lifeless technical rules—but living and life-producing ideas, *which shall contain their own evidence*, the certainty that they are essentially one with the germinal causes in nature,—his consciousness being the focus and mirror of both,—for thus does the artist for a time abandon the external real in order to return to it with a complete sympathy with its internal and actual. For of all we see, hear, feel and touch the substance is and must be in ourselves ... to know is to resemble ...'¹

In the rest of the paragraph Coleridge follows Schelling very closely, but there is one typical variation. 'The artist must imitate that which is within the thing, that which is active through form and figure [Schelling's word is the now familiar *Gestalt*], and *discourses to us by symbols*—the *Naturgeist*, or spirit of nature, as we unconsciously imitate those whom we love [there is nothing about love in Schelling]; for so only can he hope to produce any work truly natural in the object and *truly human in the effect*. The idea which puts the form together cannot itself be the form. It is above form, and is its essence, the universal in the individual, or the individuality itself,—the glance and exponent of the indwelling power.'²)

I do not wish to insist on a distinction between Coleridge

¹ *Biographia Literaria* (Oxford, 1907), II, 258–9. My italics.

² This last sentence is a direct translation of Schelling's sentence, but even here Coleridge introduces 'the individual', to give firm anchorage to the fine phrases.

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and Schelling in their formulation of the romantic principle—the underlying theories are identical and though Coleridge was a romantic poet before he became a romantic philosopher,¹ and always tested his ideas against his experience, nevertheless the formulation of a theory of romanticism (more exactly, of this particular theory of romanticism) was first made by Schelling.² But where Schelling speaks of impersonal forces and abstract forms, Coleridge everywhere inserts the human element, knowing that these forces only have effect, these forms significance, in so far as they are related to ourselves. The purpose of it all is teleological: ‘the object of art is to give the whole [of nature] *ad hominem*; hence each step of nature hath its ideal, and hence the possibility of a climax up to the perfect form of a harmonized chaos.’³

Art has an evolutionary function in relation to human consciousness—I have elsewhere described that function as the progressive refinement of the apprehending faculties of consciousness.³ Art is the faculty by means of which man has made a harmony out of the chaos of perception. I will not develop that theme in the present connection, but only observe that the idea was present in Coleridge’s mind.

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I assume that by now the romantic principle is disengaged from its philosophical background and clearly defined. I do not

¹ Coleridge first set foot in Germany the very month that saw the publication of the *Lyrical Ballads* (September, 1798).

² Coleridge himself always spoke of the ‘coincidence’ of his and Schelling’s ideas, and there is no reason to doubt his claim. ‘As my opinions were formed before I was acquainted with the schools of Fichte and Schelling, so do they remain independent of them, though I con- and pro-fess great obligations to them in the development of my thoughts, and yet seem to feel that I should have been more useful had I been left to evolve them myself without knowledge of their coincidence.’ (Letter to J. H. Green, December 13, 1817. *Letters*, II, 683.)

³ *Art and the Evolution of Man*. Conway Memorial Lecture. London, 1951.

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wish to ignore the fact that the theory, as expounded by Coleridge and Schelling, has a transcendental and even a mystical element in it. The *Natur-geist* is not a phenomenon recognized by natural science, and in so far as the theory endows the artist with special powers of revelation, it must be treated as a metaphysical speculation. But from the point of view of aesthetics, of the science of literary expression, it is possible to disengage this speculative element in the theory, and we are then left with a scientific hypothesis which might be restated in these terms:

✓ 'The form of a work of art is inherent in the emotional situation of the artist; it proceeds from his apprehension of that situation (a situation that may involve either external objective phenomena or internal states of mind) and is the creation of a formal equivalence (i.e. a symbol) for that situation. It resists or rejects all attempts to fit the situation to a ready-made formula of expression, believing that to impose such a generalized shape on a unique emotion or intuition results in insincerity of feeling and artificiality of form.' ✓ :

That, I believe, is merely a rephrasing of ideas which were the general basis of the Romantic Movement in Europe, and which were common to such founders of the Movement as Goethe, Schiller, Schelling, Coleridge and Kierkegaard. My main object in this book is to test the principle against the practice of some of our leading poets, beginning with Coleridge himself. At the same time, of course, we shall test the adequacy of the principle, not only in relation to these poets, but philosophically—I would even say scientifically. The principle of form, or rather, *formation*, is universal, and is present, as physicists and biologists are demonstrating with increasing clarity, in all fields of evolution. It is life itself that is the creator of forms—evolution is morphogenesis, the power of creating new forms for organic ends. That poetry should, after all, have a purpose, is perhaps by now an un-

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expected notion, but we need some explanation of its persistence in the face of social indifference. There is an obstinate impulse at work, and I think it must be related to organic factors—to those factors which, in the evolution of the species, strive towards *animation*. The modern scientist is willing to admit that matter and spirit are intimately linked together—how else can form, everywhere present in observed phenomena, acquire its significance? In particular, how do neural structures, such as exist in the brain, acquire consciousness? The nervous centres are organized to some purpose, and the secret is in the process of organization, in the *fact* of organization. Modern scientists for the most part seem to have abandoned both Mechanism and Vitalism as a sufficient explanation of these evolutionary processes, and have substituted a word that recalls Schelling and Coleridge—the word Organicism. The position has been neatly summarized by a professor of human anatomy and embryology:

‘Neither the doctrine of Mechanism nor Vitalism can afford an adequate translation of the situation before us. Mechanistic ideas can only seem satisfactory if one forgets the human mind which has built up and which defends the theory. Vitalism invokes factors or principles which are not demonstrable and which are not even necessary hypotheses. Consequently, the author wishes to finish by asserting his scientific faith in Organicism, which reconciles the struggle for objectivity with a full respect for life. And from a broader, philosophical point of view, he desires to underline that whatever aspect of form is examined, be it in the most general sense, or in morphogenesis, in evolution, or in mental achievements, the primacy of an Order, of an Idea, can always be asserted.’¹

¹ ‘Form and Modern Embryology’, by Albert M. Dalcq. *Aspects of Form*, ed. Lancelot Law Whyte. London, 1951, p. 113.

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Coleridge regarded himself as a failure as a poet—an opinion the world has been very ready to accept, though with lingering doubts and evident regret. If we think of his poems generally they fall into three main groups: (1) pastiches of ancient ballad literature; (2) conversational or ruminative pieces; and (3) the miracle of 'Kubla Khan'.

Coleridge described 'Kubla Khan' as a 'psychological curiosity' and published it as such (on Byron's request) rather than for 'any supposed poetic merits'. Poets do not necessarily recognize their best work, and are apt to value highest what has cost most effort. No effort at all was involved in the composition of 'Kubla Khan', and its particular magic is due to the transformation, in the unconscious, of imagery derived from a wide field of reference, as Livingston Lowes has shown. The verbal felicity of the poem, its metrical movement, all contribute to a poetic effect which is not in any way to be questioned. If I decide to ignore 'Kubla Khan' in considering Coleridge's poetic practice, it is merely because it is not typical of that practice.

✓ For his general poetic practice Coleridge depended, like any other genuine poet, on what he called 'a genial recurrence of the ray divine'. He did not doubt the necessity of inspiration; but he distrusted it when it was the result of taking an anodyne. He rejected, some hundred and fifty years before its formulation, the surrealist doctrine of automatism in art. If that deprived us of other poems like 'Kubla Khan', we can only regret this distrust of his dream activities. True inspiration he, as well as Wordsworth, regarded as a heightened state of sensibility arising in the act of composition. 'Where there exists that degree of genius and talent which entitles a writer to aim at the honours of a poet, the very *act* of poetic composition *itself* is, and is *allowed* to imply and to produce,

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an unusual state of excitement, which of course justifies and demands a correspondent difference of language ✓...¹ ‘The wheels take fire from the mere rapidity of their motion’—an image he took from Dryden. That, I think, is the generally accepted theory of induced inspiration in the arts, but the consequence is not always observed. It was observed by Coleridge, who points out in the same context that ‘as every passion has its proper pulse, so will it likewise have its characteristic modes of expression’. But how, in the act of composition, does the pulse record its characteristic beat?

Most directly, of course, in rhythm. Coleridge was never tired of pointing out that the characteristic excellence of Shakespeare’s versification is due to the fact that it is ‘the necessary and homogeneous vehicle of his peculiar manner of thinking’, and that Shakespeare’s blank verse was ‘an absolutely new creation’ demanded by Shakespeare’s realization of this principle. Again: ‘His (Shakespeare’s) blank verse has nothing equal to it but that of Milton. Such fulness of thought gives an involution of metre so natural to the expression of passions, which fills and elevates the mind, and gives general truths in full, free, and poetic language.’ The implication is that anything in the nature of fixed metrical patterns is replaced by a free rhythm peculiarly fitted to the immediate needs of expression: the beat in the rhythm is the pulse of the thought itself.

All these questions are fully discussed in Chapter XVIII of *Biographia Literaria*—the chapter on ‘Language of metrical composition, why and wherein essentially different from that of prose—Origin and elements of metre—Its necessary consequences, and the conditions thereby imposed on the metrical writer in the choice of his diction’. It is one of Coleridge’s most brilliant technical expositions. But the substance of his

¹ *Biog. Lit.*, II, 56.

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theory I have already given, and I am now anxious to pass on to Coleridge's own practice, reserving for the next chapter a discussion of his criticism of Wordsworth's practice.

The ideal was to be a combination of 'natural thoughts with natural diction'. This ideal Coleridge had found in the first place in the ballads, as collected by Bishop Percy; and in imitating the ballads, in such poems as 'The Ancient Mariner' and 'Christabel', he was expressing a preference for their freedom of technique as much as for their supernatural or 'romantic' atmosphere. In his prefatory 'Essay on Ancient Minstrels', Percy wrote: 'The reader will observe in the more ancient ballads in this collection, a cast of style and measure very different from that of contemporary poets of a higher class [the Bishop was writing in 1765]; many phrases and idioms, which the Minstrels seem to have appropriated to themselves, and a very remarkable licence of varying the accents of words at pleasure, in order to humour the flow of the verse . . .'

The ballad most directly used as a model for 'The Ancient Mariner' is 'Sir Cauline',¹ but only a direct comparison will bring out the particularities of the imitation. Percy remarked in his introductory note to 'Sir Cauline' that 'There is something peculiar in the metre of this old ballad; it is not unusual to meet with redundant stanzas of six lines; but the occasional insertion of a double third or fourth line, is an irregularity I do not remember to have seen elsewhere.' It was an irregularity Coleridge did not hesitate to adopt—compare:

*Then shee held forthe her lilly-white hand
Towards that knighte so free;
He gave it one gentill kisse,
His heart was brought from bale to blisse,
The teares sterte from his ee.*

¹ This has been previously pointed out by H. Littledale in his edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*, Oxford, 1924, p. 215.

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with:

*Her lips are red, her looks are free,
Her locks are yellow as gold:
Her skin is as white as leprosy,
And she is far liker Death than he;
Her flesh makes the still air cold.* (1798)

The basic measure of the ballads is iambic quatrains, but it is rare to find a perfect iambic quatrain in an early ballad like 'Sir Cauline'. Here is an exception:

*But when she found her comelye knight
Indeed was dead and gone,
She layde her pale cold cheek to his,
And thus she made her moane:*

Such regular quatrains are far commoner in 'The Ancient Mariner'—indeed, they predominate. A stanza like the following, with four anapaests to a single line, is the exception:

*I closed my lids, and kept them close,
And the balls like pulses beat;
For the sky and the sea, and the sea and the sky
Lay like a load on my weary eye,
And the dead were at my feet.*

The general effect, in spite of the predominance of iambics, is one of variety and freedom. There are many lines like:

Stunned by that loud and dreadful sound

or

*Forthwith this frame of mine was wrenched
With a woful agony*

which cannot be construed except as 'involutions of metre . . . natural to the expression of passions'—as 'full, free and poetic language'.

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In 'Christabel', the first part of which was written about a year after 'The Ancient Mariner', Coleridge moves still further in the direction of freedom. The basic iambic structure has gone, and in its place is a radically new system of versification. In his Preface to the poem Coleridge wrote:

'I have only to add that the metre of 'Christabel' is not, properly speaking, irregular, though it may seem so from its being founded on a new principle: namely, that of counting in each line the accents, not the syllables. Though the latter may vary from seven to twelve, yet in each line the accents will be found to be only four. Nevertheless, this occasional variation in number of syllables is not introduced wantonly, or for the mere ends of convenience, but in correspondence with some transition in the nature of the imagery or passion.'

This system of versification, as Hopkins was to point out,¹ amounted to no more than a free interchange of two-syllabled with three-syllabled feet, but 'it is enough'—enough, that is to say, to give the poet all the freedom he needs. Sprung-rhythm, as we shall see when we come to deal with Hopkins, is a further development of the ballad-measures and the measure of 'Christabel'.

An examination of this measure shows that it is even more irregular than Coleridge had forewarned us in his Preface. At least, if we take lines like:

Of the huge, broad-breasted, old oak tree

or:

On the topmost twig that looks up at the sky

it is difficult to scan them without allowing, in the first case six, in the second five, accents. In other cases it is difficult to discover more than three:

My sire is of a noble line

¹ *Letters to R. W. Dixon*, p. 21.

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or:

Is the night chilly and dark?

These irregularities are very frequent, and rhyme apart, the versification of ‘Christabel’ is as free as any poet could desire whose aim is to make the metre correspond with the transitions of the imagery or passion. But these two poems, ‘The Ancient Mariner’ and ‘Christabel’, illustrate a deeper problem which we can best discuss when we have considered the further category of Coleridge’s poetry which I mentioned, the conversational or ruminative pieces.

The greatest of these is the Ode ‘Dejection’, written on the 4th of April, 1802, which has a rhymed structure with lines of unequal length sometimes called ‘Pindaric’. A larger group, including ‘This Lime-tree Bower my Prison’ (June, 1797), ‘Frost at Midnight’ (February, 1798), ‘Fears in Solitude’ (April, 1798), and ‘The Nightingale’ (April, 1798), are written in blank verse.

Let us leave ‘Dejection’ on one side for a moment, and consider Coleridge’s blank verse. It was, of course, based on a perfect understanding of Shakespeare’s blank verse, of which he said, we may recall:

‘His language is entirely his own, and the younger dramatists imitated him. The construction of Shakespeare’s sentences, whether in verse or prose, is the necessary and homogeneous vehicle of his peculiar manner of thinking. His is not the style of the age. More particularly, Shakespeare’s blank verse is an absolutely new creation.’

On the same occasion Coleridge made some remarks which distinguish the blank verse of other poets from Shakespeare’s. Of Daniel’s he said:

‘The style and language are just such as any very pure and manly writer of the present day—Wordsworth, for example

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—would use; it seems quite modern in comparison with the style of Shakespeare. Ben Johnson's blank verse is very masterly and individual, and perhaps Massinger's is even still nobler. In Beaumont and Fletcher it is constantly slipping into lyricisms.¹

From these remarks, and others in *Biographia Literaria*, we get a theory of blank verse which might be expressed thus: Basically it is a direct and even a prosaic expression of the poet's thoughts, with a rhythmic structure of five accents to the line. But what gives it distinction in any individual poet is 'the sinewy strength and originality of single lines and paragraphs',² the 'curiosa felicitas' of the diction, shown in a particular configuration of rhythm, an original choice of epithets and images, and an overall fusion of all these constituent elements in an effortless utterance.

If we now turn to the 'Lime-tree Bower', we find the neutral style of Daniel, but no particular individuality. Here are the opening lines:

*Well, they are gone, and here must I remain
This lime-tree bower my prison! I have lost
Beauties and feelings, such as would have been
Most sweet to my remembrance even when age
Had dimmed mine eyes to blindness!*

The movement is perfect, but the 'felicitas' is not 'curiosa'. The same may be said of 'Frost at Midnight', though I do not think the 'well-languaged Daniel' would have been capable of the final paragraph, so acutely observant, and, in the last line at least, so felicitous:

*Therefore all seasons shall be sweet to thee,
Whether the summer clothe the general earth*

¹ *Table Talk* (Oxford, 1917), 295.

² *Biog. Lit.*, II, 121.

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*With greenness, or the redbreast sit and sing
Betwixt the tufts of snow on the bare branch
Of mossy apple-tree, while the nigh thatch
Smokes in the sun-thaw; whether the eave-drops fall
Heard only in the trances of the blast,
Or if the secret ministry of frost
Shall hang them up in silent icicles,
Quietly shining to the quiet moon.*

'Fears in Solitude' is spoilt by its political rhetoric, though it recovers its manners in the final paragraph. 'The Nightingale' is more worthy of attention, but never rises above the neutral style. There are other blank verse poems deserving our attention, the 'Hymn before Sun-rise' and the 'Lines to William Wordsworth' 'composed on the night after his recitation of a poem on the growth of an individual mind'. But I think there is more to be learned about Coleridge's practice of his precepts in the matter of versification from an examination of the Ode 'Dejection', for it will enable us to approach the problem involved in the notion of poetic objectivity.

The Ode which Coleridge first published in the *Morning Post* on the 4th of October, 1802, had been composed six months earlier in a form very different from that given to the public. The full version was first published as recently as 1937 by Ernest de Selincourt in volume XXII of *Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association*. It was republished ten years later in a collection of Professor de Selincourt's essays,¹ but the poem in its completeness is not well-known. Yet the original version is a great and moving poem, and a comparison of the two versions, with a consideration of the reasons which led Coleridge to revise the poem before publication, raises a problem of the greatest critical importance.

The original version is a continuous poem of 340 lines.

¹ *Wordsworthian and Other Studies*, Oxford (1947), 57-76.

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What might be called the standard version, first published by Coleridge in a collection of his poems called *Sibylline Leaves* in 1817, is merely 139 lines long, and the *Morning Post* version of 1802 is even shorter still. In its ruthlessly lopped state the poem is no longer a continuous train of thought, and is therefore divided into eight numbered and re-arranged sections. Apart from these larger structural changes, numerous small revisions have been made in the remaining text which completely disguise its origin and alter its tone. The considerations which led Coleridge to make these alterations were partly personal and partly critical. But before we can discuss them profitably we must take into account the circumstances in which the poem was composed.

As is generally known, Coleridge had married in haste and repented at leisure. For our present purposes it is not necessary to take sides in the quarrel, for we are concerned only with Coleridge's feelings in the matter, and of these there is no doubt. He gave full expression to them in a letter written in October of this same year 1802 to his friend and benefactor, Thomas Wedgwood. Let me quote a few sentences from this revealing document:

‘After my return to Keswick’, Coleridge wrote, ‘I was, if possible, more miserable than before. Scarce a day passed without such a scene of discord between me and Mrs Coleridge, as quite incapacitated me from any worthy exertion of my faculties by degrading me in my own estimation. I found my temper impaired, and daily more so; the good and pleasurable thoughts, which had been the support of my moral character, departed from my solitude. I determined to go abroad—but alas! the less I loved my wife, the more dear and necessary did my children seem to me. I found no comfort except in the driest speculations. . . . About two months ago I was taken suddenly ill with spasms in my stomach—I ex-

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pected to die—Mrs C. was, of course, shocked and frightened beyond measure—and two days after, I still being very weak and pale as death, she threw herself upon me and made a solemn promise of amendment—and she has kept her promise beyond any hope I could have flattered myself with. . . . If any woman wanted an exact and copious Recipe, “How to make a Husband compleatly miserable”, I could furnish her with one—with a Probatum est, tacked to it. Ill-tempered Speeches sent after me when I went out of the House, ill-tempered Speeches on my return, my friends received with freezing looks, the least opposition or contradiction occasioning screams of passion, and the sentiments which I held most base, ostentatiously avowed—all this added to the utter negation of all, which a Husband expects from a Wife—especially, living in retirement—and the consciousness that I was myself growing a worse man. O dear Sir! no one can tell what I have suffered. I can say with strict truth, that the happiest half-hours I have had, were when all of a sudden, as I have been sitting alone in my Study I have burst into Tears.¹

Such was Coleridge’s state of mind when he wrote ‘*Dejection*’. But he did not tell Tom Wedgwood the whole truth—he did not tell him that the passion he had once felt for Sarah Fricker, his wife, he now felt for Sara Hutchinson, the sister of Mary who was to become Wordsworth’s wife.

*All thoughts, all passions, all delights;
Whatever stirs this mortal frame
All are but ministers of Love,
And feed his sacred flame . . .*

The lovely ballad which opens with these lines had been inspired by this new and deep and hopeless passion, and had been written three years before the letter to Wedgwood. It

¹ *Unpublished Letters*, I, 214–8.

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had been written in December, 1799, and the following summer, in order to be near the object of his new passion, Coleridge had moved to the Lake District, and during the next few years Coleridge and Sara saw much of each other. During all this time Coleridge's health was rapidly deteriorating—apart from the spasms in the stomach mentioned to Wedgwood he suffered from giddiness and rheumatic pains, and it was then that he first had fatal recourse to opium. He was indeed a miserable man, but he was also a deeply religious man, and his convictions forbade him any thought of a divorce. He had three women to minister to him in his sickness, to sympathize with his misery—Mary and Sara Hutchinson, and Dorothy Wordsworth, who was as hopelessly in love with him as he was with Sara. It was in a mood induced by the tenderness of these ministering angels that he wrote the Ode 'Dejection'.

It is such an intimate poem, so self-revealing and so revealing of a complex passionate situation affecting others, that no other excuse would be necessary for the considerable excisions which Coleridge made in the published version. But there was another consideration, to which I have already referred, of a more theoretical nature. Coleridge held the view, which I think we ought to share with him, that the best poetry is not written out of what we might call private situations. The best poetry is *objective*—it is aloof. In the *Biographia Literaria* Coleridge praises Shakespeare for possessing this quality. A sign of his genius, he says, 'is the choice of subjects very remote from the private interests and circumstances of the writer himself. At least', he adds, 'I have found, that where the subject is taken immediately from the author's personal sensations and experiences, the excellence of a particular poem is but an equivocal mark, and often a fallacious pledge, of genuine poetic power'. I think there is no doubt that Coleridge had this particular poem of his own in mind when

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making such a statement. This general principle of objectivity or aloofness (or 'aesthetic distance', as the aestheticians call it), is one which might be discussed at length, but for the moment it is perhaps sufficient to note that it is a principle recognized in all the arts, and it is perhaps a distinguishing mark between certain schools of art—the idealist school, for example, accepting it as a matter of course, but the realist, and more particularly the expressionist artist, going to the opposite extreme and making personal experiences the basis of his work.

We will consider presently what, if anything, was lost in this particular case of the 'depersonalization' of a poem, but let us first ask how we are to square this principle of objectivity with the romantic principle itself—with Coleridge's own demand that form should proceed from the intuitive experience of the poet. Schelling and Coleridge provide the answer: the 'squaring' takes place within that dialectical process whereby the external is reconciled with the internal, the conscious with the unconscious.

The two factors that Coleridge himself did in fact reconcile in 'Dejection' were on the one hand a full private confession of his feelings, and on the other hand a public expression of generalized sentiments. Let us observe in the first place that there is no distinction of technique involved—at least, none of poetic diction. The original version of the poem has a closer sequence or continuity, and is only broken by an organic paragraphing, demanded by the transitions of the thought. In the final version the excisions require an arrangement of the fragments in numbered stanzas, which makes a virtue of the necessary gaps in the thought. I do not suppose that anyone who remained ignorant of the original continuity of the poem would complain of this division of the poem into separate 'movements'. This quality of continuity apart, there is no doubt that in cutting the poem and disguising its per-

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sonal nature, Coleridge managed to salvage all the heat and fire of the original text. He may have been actuated by personal motives, but at the same time his critical powers were at work, and what he kept, and what he sacrificed, was determined by literary judgment no less than by social prudence. There are passages of moving simplicity which we must regret:

*It was as calm as this, that happy night
When Mary, thou, and I together were,
The low decaying fire our only Light,
And listen'd to the Stillness of the Air.*

There is at least one passage of confessional pathos which must always be remembered when we are considering Cole-ridge's tragic life:

*I speak not now of those habitual Ills
That wear out Life, when two unequal Minds
Meet in one House and two discordant Wills—
This leaves me, where it finds,
Past Cure, and past Complaint,—a fate austere
Too fix'd and hopeless to partake of Fear!*

Passages such as these indicate, perhaps, that something essential was lost—something we might call emotional integrity; something was sacrificed to a higher integrity. The two versions differ as the course of a river running through a virgin landscape, and the still waters and divided lawns of a public garden. But both grew in the same light of nature, both were organic in their substance and of living beauty. There is neither imprisonment nor death in the final form given to the poem: that form still proceeds from the core of the artist's consciousness. The reconciliation that has been effected is not a formal one at all, in the immediate sense of poetic expression; rather it is a generalization of personal experience—and in

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that sense a reconciliation of the internal with the external. The two most significant lines in the poem make this clear:

*I may not hope from outward forms to win
The passion and the life, whose fountains are within.*

But the whole poem bears witness to the fact that those fountains are impeded by a too conscious or direct expression of personal emotions. We now see why Schelling's theory of a necessary retreat into the unconscious appealed to Coleridge, for his own creative experience had taught him that the material of sensational experience must be transmuted in some mental alembic before it can emerge in poetic form. Such is the process of reconciliation of the external with the internal effected by the poet, and 'Dejection' is a poem where we can see the poet consciously distinguishing between what had, and what had not, passed through the alembic and thereby acquired universal significance. The weakness of the poem, as compared with a poem like Wordsworth's 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality', springs from this conscious dichotomy. This is openly, beautifully confessed in the sixth section of the final version:

*There was a time when . . .
 . . . all misfortunes were but as the stuff
 Whence Fancy made me dreams of happiness . . .
But now . . .
 . . . each visitation
 Suspends what nature gave me at my birth,
 My shaping spirit of Imagination.*

In the original version there then intervened some twenty lines descriptive of his 'coarse domestic life', and of his resolve

*. . . not to think of what I needs must feel,
 But to be still and patient, all I can;*

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And haply by abstruse research to steal
From my own nature all the natural man—*

a resolve, it will be seen, to turn away from the direct contemplation of his own affliction, and to send forth from the soul

*A light, a glory, a faint luminous cloud . . .
A sweet and potent voice, of its own birth,
Of all sweet sounds the life and element!*

‘Of its own birth’—here again, in the heart of Coleridge’s most intimate poem, is the essential idea: the voice of the natural man proceeding from his own nature, and formed under laws of its own origination.

CHAPTER II

A Complex Delight: Wordsworth

[i]

From the time of his share in the composition of the *Lyrical Ballads* Wordsworth was a self-styled experimentalist in verse. ‘The majority of the following poems’, declared the Advertisement of 1798, ‘are to be considered as experiments’—a joint declaration with Coleridge, it is true, but the word was retained by Wordsworth in his Preface of 1800, and experiment was then defined as a ‘fitting to metrical arrangement’ of ‘a selection of the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation’. It must always remain uncertain to what extent Wordsworth derived his ideas about the form of poetry from Coleridge. The moral force that Wordsworth exhibits in the Prefaces is obviously his own; his, too, is the historical criticism embodied in them—the references to classical and to Elizabethan poets. But when Wordsworth begins to write about ‘the primary laws of our nature’, then he is either interpreting Hartley’s psychology, or expounding Coleridge’s. Phrases like ‘the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings’, ‘organic sensibility’, ‘influxes of feeling’, ‘passions and volitions’, are at any rate common to Coleridge and Wordsworth, and I cannot conceive that their origin was other than those German writings to which Coleridge alone had direct access. But the question of the origin of Wordsworth’s experimental attitude is not so important: what matters is the poetic result.

Wordsworth’s theory, as he admits in the 1800 Preface, led

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him to the paradoxical affirmation that ‘there neither is, nor can be, any *essential* difference between the language of prose and metrical composition’—an opinion which, as we shall see, has been reaffirmed in our own time. But Wordsworth underlines the word ‘essential’, thereby implying that there is a difference of an unessential kind between prose and verse; and he is at some pains to analyse this difference. ‘Why’, he asks rhetorically, ‘professing these opinions, have I written in verse?’ The answer he gives is very interesting. ‘A very small part of the pleasure given by poetry’, he admits, ‘depends upon the metre’, and metre, he assumes, is something ‘super-added’ (compare Coleridge’s word ‘superinduced’) to a natural form of expression. He then anticipates the Reader’s objection—‘that it is injudicious to write in metre, unless it be accompanied with the other artificial distinctions of style with which metre is usually accompanied . . .’¹ To this imaginary objection Wordsworth merely replies that poems are extant which rely on a naked and simple style, by which he seems to imply ‘the general power of numbers’ without the accompaniment of ‘certain appropriate colours of style’. He is not very explicit about these extra *colours*, but presumably he means exotic words and images, and possibly rhyme. But metre alone will suffice—that is his conclusion. But what is metre, and what is its function? We must observe his answers to these questions rather carefully.

‘The end of Poetry’, he says, ‘is to produce excitement in co-existence with an overbalance of pleasure; but, by the supposition, excitement is an unusual and irregular state of mind; ideas and feelings do not, in that state, succeed each other in accustomed order. If the words, however, by which this excitement is produced be in themselves powerful, or the images and feelings have an undue proportion of pain con-

¹ My quotations from the Prefaces, etc., are taken from the Oxford edition of the *Poetical Works*, ed. by Ernest de Selincourt, vol. ii, 383–462 (1944).

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nected with them, there is some danger that the excitement may be carried beyond its proper bounds. Now the co-presence of something regular, something to which the mind has been accustomed in various moods and in a less excited state, cannot but have great efficacy in tempering and restraining the passion by an intertexture of ordinary feeling, and of feeling not strictly and necessarily connected with the passion. This is unquestionably true; and hence, though the opinion will at first appear paradoxical, from the tendency of metre to divest language, in a certain degree, of its reality, and thus to throw a sort of half-consciousness of unsubstantial existence over the whole composition, there can be little doubt but that more pathetic situations and sentiments, that is, those which have a greater proportion of pain attached to them, may be endured in metrical composition, especially in rhyme, than in prose.'

Such is Wordsworth's theory: metre, which alone distinguishes poetry from prose, is a device for sparing the reader pain, an anodyne, a soothing syrup! Poetry probes deep, excites pain; it must be thrown back into a 'sort of half-consciousness'. We are very near to Freud's reality- and pleasure-principles! The whole passage is curious, and significant, in relation to Wordsworth's psychological development at the time it was written, in its insistence on the painfulness of passionate experience, on the necessity of restraining the expression of passion—tempering it to the intensity of 'ordinary feeling'.

But Wordsworth does not hesitate to dig a little deeper. After observing that metre may also have the opposite effect of imparting passion to otherwise dull or prosaic statements, he asks what can be the cause of such reflexes. He finds it in a typical Coleridgean principle: 'the perception of similitude in dissimilitude', but in illustrating the functioning of this principle, he hits upon another significant psychological factor.

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'This principle is the great spring of the activity of our minds, and their chief feeder. From this principle the direction of the sexual appetite, and all the passions connected with it, take their origin: it is the life of our ordinary conversation; and upon the accuracy with which similitude in dissimilitude, and dissimilitude in similitude are perceived, depend our taste and our moral feelings.'

In so far as we are dealing with a specific feature like metre, the application of this principle is fairly easy to understand: the perception of similitude in dissimilitude is presumably the awareness of a regularity of pattern underlying expressions of diverse feelings. The pattern, being pleasurable, supports the extremes of feeling, modulates their effects, and in this manner conveys to the reader an overbalance of pleasure. It is not so clear how this same principle can direct the sexual appetite 'and all the passions connected with it'. But let us keep to the main argument, for immediately on the passage I have just quoted follows the famous and much misunderstood definition of poetry—a definition usually cut down to 'one misleading phrase, 'emotion recollected in tranquillity'. I have on a former occasion¹ tried to recover the sense of what Wordsworth actually said; here let me merely emphasize that the phrase is entirely subordinate to its context, which is a discussion of the function of metre. Wordsworth is pointing out that the recollection of emotion in tranquillity produces by reaction a spontaneous overflow of feelings, and that this overflow must be controlled by some means if poetry is to be composed. The means is metre—a veil of harmony drawn over the description of the deeper passions, through which we indistinctly perceive a language closely resembling that of real life. The specific quality of poetry is the 'complex delight' produced by this interplay of the reality- and pleasure-principles.

¹ *Wordsworth* (1949 edn.), III-2.

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'This, it seems to me, is a theory very different from any theory of poetry conceived by Coleridge. And so, indeed, Coleridge himself felt when he came to deal with the subject in Chapter XVIII of *Biographia Literaria*. After pointing out, in the preceding chapter, the equivocation in Wordsworth's use of the word 'real' to describe the *ordinary* language of men, and after showing that such language is not the property of a particular class of men, for 'everyman's language varies, according to the extent of his knowledge, the activity of his faculties, and the depth and quickness of his feelings', Coleridge goes on to examine Wordsworth's paradoxical statement that there is no 'essential difference' between the language of prose and the language of poetry. Characteristically, Coleridge pauses on the word 'essential', and has a paragraph, lending further colour to my suggestion that Coleridge may be regarded as among the first existentialist philosophers,¹ in which he distinguishes between *essence* as 'in its primary significance . . . the principle of *individuation*, the inmost principle of the possibility of any thing, as that particular thing', and *existence* as 'the superinduction of *reality*'. He then goes on to point out that Wordsworth, in his use of the word *essence*, meant to imply no more than 'the point or ground of contradistinction between two modifications of the same substance or subject'. 'Thus we should be allowed to say, that the style of architecture of Westminster Abbey is *essentially* different from that of St Paul's, even though both had been built of blocks cut into the same form, and from the same quarry'. Only in this sense, says Coleridge, can Wordsworth deny what is usually affirmed, that the formal construction of poetry is *essentially* different from that of prose.

Coleridge then proceeds to controvert Wordsworth. The whole passage is of the greatest relevance to our enquiry, and must be read carefully, beginning with the seventh paragraph

¹ Cf. 'Coleridge as Critic', p. 180 below.

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of the chapter and going on, with the usual digressions, to the end of it. Let me try to summarize Coleridge's argument:

1. Coleridge contends that in both prose and poetry there is a characteristic *construction*, what we should now (and what Schelling even then did) call a *Gestalt*. Such constructions are not interchangeable as between poetry and prose.

2. Metre probably *originated* as a spontaneous effort to hold passions in check, but its use is now voluntary or habitual, and designed to blend delight with emotion. It is no longer a superinduced control, but rather a free partnership or union—‘an interpenetration of passion and of will, of spontaneous impulse and of *voluntary* purpose’.

3. Metre is a positive ingredient; not obtrusive, but resembling yeast, ‘worthless or disagreeable by itself, but giving vivacity and spirit to the liquor with which it is proportionately combined.’ Metre added to language produces an effect different from that produced by unmetrical prose.

4. ‘As every passion [defined as an excited state of the feelings and faculties] has its proper pulse, so will it likewise have its characteristic modes of expression.’

5. Metre provides an overall unity by harmonious adjustment of the parts to the whole, but does so by a process of interfusion. It follows that it is possible to have sentences which would be equally in place in both verse and prose, but in verse they become poetic in their metrical context, and because of this metrical context.

6. The final test of a metre is instinctive. ‘It is the prerogative of poetic genius to distinguish by parental instinct its proper offspring from the changelings, which the gnomes of vanity or the fairies of fashion may have laid in its cradle or called by its names. Could a rule be given from *without*, poetry would cease to be poetry, and sink into a mechanical art . . . The rules of the IMAGINATION are themselves the very powers of growth and production.’

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[ii]

What does all this constitute but one more affirmation of the romantic principle in poetry? And what is Coleridge's intention other than the incorporation of Wordsworth's own poetry within this tradition? He has made mincemeat of Wordsworth's own theory—called it a 'groundless' system; and he proceeds to show, in the following two chapters, how little application the theory has to Wordsworth's own practice. Wordsworth's poetic diction, he says, next to that of Shakespeare and Milton, 'appears to me the most *individualized* and characteristic'. He quotes poems like 'Lucy Gray', 'The Idle Shepherd-boys', 'The Blind Highland Boy', 'Ruth', and extracts from the longer poems, and italicizes passages which, he points out, would at once be recognized as Wordsworth's and no one else's. But before we proceed to an examination of this Wordsworthian diction, let me summarize the two points of view that have to be reconciled:

Wordsworth maintains that metre is a strait-jacket voluntarily imposed on the poet's otherwise too nakedly passionate utterance; it constitutes a danger in that it leads to an artificial choice of words (to fit the metre); the poet is challenged by this contradiction and must rise above it; in doing so he will produce a complex delight.

✓Coleridge maintains that metre is spontaneous, instinctive, the proper pulse of the poet's utterance, the choice of words being determined in the same spontaneous way, words and metre indissolubly fused together. (Wordsworth, in theory, confuses artifice and individuality; in practice he is one of the most individual poets that ever wrote.) ✓

[iii]

If we now examine the 'characteristic excellencies' in Wordsworth's poetry so designated by Coleridge, we find

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ourselves at once confronted by the phenomenon of the poetic *Gestalt*, the compositional unity of the poem—or, in the longer poems, of the poetic ‘passage’ or paragraph. Certain poets, Coleridge had pointed out,—and he instanced in particular Shakespeare and Milton—have an *individualized* and *characteristic* diction; and he proceeds to claim the same peculiarity for Wordsworth. Of these poets we can say: ‘Such he *is*: so he *writes*’. A correspondence exists between the personality of the poet and the structure of his poetry—that is the general proposition. Our purpose now is to investigate the laws of this correspondency in the particular case of Wordsworth.

The lines from ‘Lucy Gray’ selected by Coleridge as a particularly good illustration of ‘correspondence’ are very familiar:

✓
The sweetest thing that ever grew
Beside a human door! ✓

In isolation such lines may seem banal, rhythmically and verbally banal; but it is almost impossible for an English reader to isolate them, familiar as he is with the poem as a whole. The individuality of such lines, indeed, is only to be appreciated within the general Wordsworthian ethos of childhood, and within the more specialized atmosphere of the poem—the wide, snow-clad moor, the solitary child, her tragic death, and so forth. To use the modern jargon, the reader has been ‘conditioned’ to the reception of a particular stimulus. This stimulus is wider than the poem itself, or Wordsworth’s own work, for we have at the back of our minds the whole ballad tradition, within which ‘Lucy Gray’ was written—a tradition which makes frequent use of this particular effect of pathetic simplicity, and a tradition which Wordsworth had consciously adopted.

This tradition, as we have already noted, permits a con-

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siderable degree of metrical irregularity. But there is nothing metrically irregular about

*The sweetest thing that ever grew
Beside a human door!*

We must therefore conclude that the ‘individuality’ of such lines only becomes apparent as part of a complex pattern—such lines are muted chords in an otherwise more plangent composition. Wordsworth was a master of just such transitions into breathless simplicity.

That the poem is not without its metrical irregularities will soon emerge from further examination. How, for example, without distortion of natural utterance, are we to scan the lines:

*Then downwards from the steep hill's edge
They tracked the footmarks small;
And through the broken hawthorn hedge,
And by the long stone-wall . . .?*

Characteristic as are such simple lyrical utterances, and recognizably Wordsworthian, the most personal passages in his poetry come in the longer blank-verse poems, and it is in his blank verse that Wordsworth achieves his greatest power, and his greatest freedom—his ‘curiosa felicitas’.

I do not wish to convey the impression that metrical analysis alone will reveal the individuality of a poem. I do not claim that the ‘structure’ of a poem resides entirely in accent and quantity. One cannot in any way break down the *Getsalt* that is a poem without at the same time destroying an integral unity or totality which is itself ‘characteristic’. The symbol is always inviolate. To proceed to the metrical analysis of some passages from Wordsworth’s longer poems might seem therefore to be excluded as a useful method by our very premisses. But our aim is not analytical in this sense. If the general purpose of such prosodic splintering were merely to

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show the shape of the splinters, we would be left with the débris of a poem. Our special purpose is rather to trace the contour of the poem—to mark certain levels of depth or pressure and to show, that as they weave in and out of the structure of the words, they reveal a definite form, a symbolic form. It is impossible, by crude typographical means, to indicate the outline of these contours. All we can do is to mark points on them, and then connect them imaginatively.

The scanning of blank verse is, of course, anybody's game, and I am well aware that academic theory allows a few irregularities on the excuse that monotony is thus avoided, or that rare felicities justify licence. My contention is that blank verse is virtually free verse, and that precisely 'at its most poetic, is most irregular. This general proposition might be illustrated from the work of Shakespeare or of Milton, but here I am confining myself to Wordsworth's blank verse. Let me take, in the first place, those lines quoted by Coleridge (in Chapter XX of *Biographia Literaria*) as characteristic of Wordsworth's 'elevated' style—the lines on the 'Boy of Winander-Mere' who

*Bléw mínic hóotings to the silent ówls,
That théy might ánswer him.—And théy would shóut
Acróss the wátery vále, and shóut agáiñ,
Responsible to his cálí, with quívering péals,
And lóng hallóos and scréams, and échoes lóud
Redóubled and redóubled; cóncourse wíld
Of mírth and jócund dín. And whén it chánced
That páuses of déep sílence móck'd his skíll,
Then sómetímes, in that sílence, while he húng
Listening, a géntle shóck of míld surpríze
Has cárried fár into his héart the vóice
Of móuntain tórents; or the víslle scéne
Would énter únawáres into his mínd*

*A Complex Delight: Wordsworth
With áll its sólemn ímagery, its rócks,
Its wóods, and thát uncértain Héaven, received
Into the bósom of the stéady Láke.¹*

I have marked the obvious stresses with an acute accent ('), and have used a circumflex accent (^) to indicate what I would call a muffled stress—it seems impossible to me to give full value to the stress on, for example, the word 'him' in the second line; whereas the 'its' and the 'that' in the fourteenth and fifteenth line need some kind of emphasis.

If one allows 'watery' in line 3, 'listening' in line 10, 'visible' in line 12, and 'ímagery' in line 14 to have a vowel elided to make the words disyllabic—an ugly effect in the cases of 'visible' and 'ímagery', then we may allow the lines a regularity of syllabic content. But that is about the only regularity they possess. Only three lines, the second, the seventh and the fifteenth have a regular iambic beat. In the others the stresses are unevenly distributed, and in four lines it is difficult to give a natural stress to more than four syllables (lines 1, 11, 12, 16). Line 16, indeed, will only bear three natural stresses—'Into the bósom of the stéady Láke'. To stress prepositions like the second syllable of 'into', or 'of,' offends against all Wordsworth's laws of natural speech, and we cannot think that Wordsworth himself intended such syllables to be stressed.

If we take a passage of Wordsworth's maturest blank verse, a philosophical passage of the most exalted kind from the last book of the 1850 version of *The Prelude*, the irregularity is even more marked:

*This spíritual lóve ácts nót nôr cán exíst
Withóut Imáginatióñ, whích, in trúth,
Ís but anóther náme for ábsolute pówer
And cléarest ínsight, ámplítúde of mínd,
And Réason in her móst exálted móod.*

¹From the 1805 version of *The Prelude*.

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*This fáculsty háth béen the féeding sóurce
Of our lóng lábour: we have tráced the stréam
From the blínd cávern whénce is fáintly héard
Its nátal mûrmûr; accómpanied its cóurse
Amóng the wáys of Náture, for a tíme
. Lóst síght of it, bewildered and engúlphed:
Then givén it gréeting as it róse ônce móre
In stréngth, reflécting from its plácid bréast
The wórks of mán and fáce of húman lífe;
And lástly, from its prógress hâve we dráwn
Fáith in lífe éndless, the sústaining thóught
Of húman béisng, Éternity, and Gód*

Of these seventeen lines, I find it possible to scan as regular iambic pentameters only two—the second and fourteenth. There are six lines of irregular syllabic content—the first line, for example, has twelve syllables, and I find it difficult to elide any of them. Some of the stresses may be a matter of opinion—e.g. line 3 can be regularized to scan:

Is bút another náme for ábs'lute pów'r.

But the elisions are ugly, and the full stress on ‘but’ and ‘-noth-’ unnatural. The natural phrasing of the line requires only four stresses, and no elisions.

Line 4, it seems to me, requires six stresses. ‘Insight’, at any rate, requires two, though the final stress in ‘amplitude’ is doubtful (muffled)—the line might read:

. And cléarest ínsight, ámplitude of mínd—

a most irregular metrical effect.

The pulse of poetry, we must conclude, is infinitely varied and subtle in its beat. This is visually demonstrated in the studio of a broadcasting station, where there is a meter which measures the volume of a voice as it passes through the microphone. If that voice is reading poetry with care and sensitive

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regard for meaning, we see how delicately and irregularly the needle oscillates. This is the only accurate scanning that can be made of English blank verse—perhaps the only accurate scanning of any kind of verse.

[iv]

Whatever may have been his fallings away in other directions, Wordsworth remained to the end an enemy of ‘the vague, the glossy, and unfeeling’ language of the eighteenth century—his final revisions of *The Prelude*, for example, are by no means in the direction of conformity. In his last considered statement on the subject, the ‘Essay Supplementary’ of 1815, there is a forceful vindication of the poet’s creative freedom. Observing, in a passage often quoted, that in so far as a poet is great and ‘at the same time *original*’, he has the task of creating the taste by which he will be enjoyed, he goes on to describe what originality in the poet involves—how the great poet will be called upon ‘to clear and often to shape his own road:—he will be in the condition of Hannibal among the Alps.’ A public taste based on the knowledge of what is best in the past will not suffice for the appreciation of such a poet: *taste* is a metaphor, ‘taken from a *passive* sense of the human body, and transferred to things which are in their essence *not* passive,—to intellectual *arts* and *operations*.’ Proportion and congruity, he points out, if the requisite knowledge is assumed, are subjects upon which taste may be trusted—only passive instincts are involved. ‘But the profound and the exquisite in feeling, the lofty and universal in thought and imagination; or, in ordinary language, the pathetic and the sublime’—these are beyond the scope of taste, for they require the exertion of ‘a co-operating *power* in the mind of the reader’. ‘Without this auxiliary impulse, elevated or profound passion cannot exist.’

But Wordsworth does not leave the matter on this vague,

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generalized level. He proceeds to ask what this originating power in the great writer involves, and replies: 'the only infallible sign is the widening of the sphere of human sensibility'. 'Genius is the introduction of a new element into the intellectual universe'; it is 'the production of effects hitherto unknown': Some of these emotions and effects may be simple and direct; but others are 'complex and revolutionary'. And finally, 'the medium through which, in poetry, the heart is to be affected, is language: a thing subject to endless fluctuations and arbitrary associations. The genius of the poet melts these down for his purpose; but they retain their shape and quality to him who is not capable of exerting, within his own mind, a corresponding energy.' Little wonder, Wordsworth concludes, that 'the poet must reconcile himself for a season to few and scattered hearers'!

All this implies a fluid poetic diction, following (to repeat my image) the contour of the poet's emotions, responding to the inflections of his inner voice (the silent but fluctuating stream of consciousness). We do not think of Wordsworth as, in the technical sense, a revolutionary poet; he based himself on the tradition of Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare and Milton. But to return to that tradition in 1798 was a revolutionary act. It was revolutionary in that it involved the overthrow of a formidable false tradition—the tradition of Dryden and Pope, erected to pontifical magnitude by Dr Johnson and including, as Wordsworth bitterly remarked, neither Shakespeare nor Chaucer, Spenser nor Sidney, but 'Roscommon, and Stepney, and Phillips, and Walsh, and Smith, and Duke, and King, and Spratt—Halifax, Granville, Sheffield, Congreve, Broome, and other reputed Magnates—metrical writers utterly worthless and useless, except for occasions like the present, when their productions are referred to as evidence what a small quantity of brain is necessary to produce a considerable stock of admiration, provided the aspirant

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will accommodate himself to the likings and fashions of his day.'

✓ Wordsworth went back for a model to the incomparable skill of Milton; avoided Milton's artificialities so as to include something of Shakespeare's freedom, something of Spenser's felicity, and something of Chaucer's commonalty. I do not claim that he combined all their rarest virtues: he is, in the end, a little less in stature than any of his great predecessors. But he was able to relate their individualities to the common ground of an English poetic tradition, and himself to advance a little on that common ground. His technical importance has not been sufficiently appreciated, largely because we take blank verse so much for granted—as, in general, we take prose style. It is like daily bread—we lose its savour until, by chance, we are offered a poisonous substitute. Hopkins, whose strictures on Wordsworth's poetic diction we shall examine in due course, said that 'Wordsworth's particular grace, his *charisma*, as theologians say, has been granted in equal measure to so very few men since time was—to Plato and who else?'¹ Was this a question of his 'lovely gift of verse', or of his 'divine philosophy'? Hopkins was not sure. But can the philosophy and the verse, in any fundamental sense of both terms, be separated? By intense reflection on the nature of being, Wordsworth had arrived at certain convictions which he could oppose to the nihilism that already, at the opening of the nineteenth century, threatened European thought. He shared this achievement, not only with his friend Coleridge, but also with his exact contemporary, Friederich Hölderlin, who retreated into madness about the same time that Wordsworth retreated into dullness. 'But that which remains, is established by the poets'—this dictum of Hölderlin's, the concluding line of his poem 'Andenken' (Remembrance), describes the function which both poets assigned to poetry, and

¹ Letter to R. W. Dixon, 7 August 1886. *Letters*, ii, 141.

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themselves assumed. Hölderlin said that language, the most dangerous of possessions, had been given to man so that he might affirm what he is. This is exactly Wordsworth's conception of the function of the poet, and Book XIII of *The Prelude* is an inspired expression of this view—it explains the exalted and dedicated role which Wordsworth assigned to poets in general and to himself in particular. There are several passages in which this doctrine is expounded—here, for example, is an 'aside' addressed to Coleridge:

Dearest Friend,

Forgive me if I say that I, who long
Had harbour'd reverentially a thought
That Poets, even as Prophets, each with each
Connected in a mighty scheme of truth,
Have each for his peculiar dower, a sense
By which he is enabled to perceive
Something unseen before; forgive me, Friend,
If I, the meanest of this band, had hope
That unto me had also been vouchsafed
An influx, that in some sort I possess'd
A privilege, and that a work of mine,
Proceeding from the depth of untaught things,
Enduring and creative, might become
A power like one of Nature's.

Compare this with Hölderlin's fragmentary sketch for a poem (1800) from which I have already quoted a phrase:

'But man dwells in huts and wraps himself in the bashful garment, since he is more fervent and more attentive too in watching over the spirit, as the priestess the divine flame; this is his understanding. And therefore he has been given arbitrariness, and to him, godlike, has been given higher power to command and to accomplish, and therefore has language, most dangerous of possessions, been given to man, so that

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creating, destroying and perishing and returning to the ever-living, to the mistress and the mother, he may affirm what he is—that he has inherited, learned from thee, thy most divine possession, all preserving love.¹

Should that last phrase of Hölderlin's seem remote from Wordsworth, there are these lines to add from *The Prelude*, to clinch the comparison:

*By love, for here
Do we begin and end, all grandeur comes,
All truth and beauty, from pervading love,
That gone, we are as dust.*

These comparisons are not partial; they could be multiplied and extended until Wordsworth stood revealed, not as the Victorian laureate that he became, but as the first among the philosophic poets of the Romantic Movement. His place is with Coleridge and Shelley, with Hölderlin and Novalis, with Leopardi—I can think of no French equivalent. His philosophic faith cannot be formally related to Kant or Schelling, as can Coleridge's: it is too personal, too home-spun. But it belongs to the same climate of thought, and through the channel of Coleridge's mind, had direct access to these prevalent winds of doctrine.

¹ Trans. by Douglas Scott, from Martin Heidegger's essay on 'Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry' included in the volume *Existence and Being*, London (Vision), 1949. The fragment, which was written in 1800, comes from Vol. IV, 246, of Hölderlin's *Werke*, ed. Norbert von Hellingrath, Berlin, 1914.

CHAPTER III

The True Voice of Feeling: John Keats

K~~eats~~ came to the problem of poetic form without any of the philosophical equipment of either Coleridge or Wordsworth: ~~came to it and came nearer to solving~~ it in terms of conscious poetic technique. To such a statement I would like to add this preliminary qualification: when we accuse Keats of a lack of philosophical equipment we are not expressing a qualitative judgment. Keats had something infinitely more rare and precious than a trained discursive faculty—something which we must be content to call innate wisdom. Wisdom is of general scope, and the fact that on the present occasion we are going to adjust our focus to a technical matter should not blind us to the fact that the light Keats sheds on our problem is part of a wider beam. There never was an English poet, save Shakespeare, who had so instinctive a grasp of poetic realities: of the function of poetry in the life of the mind. In his short life he had no time to solve the formal problem, but the story of his experiment is full of interest. The texts, which come from his Letters, are almost too well-known to be repeated, but it would be rash to assume that their significance has been exhausted. The most important of them comes from a letter of 27 February, 1818, written to John Taylor, to whom he had sent the proofs of the newly-written *Endymion*:

'It is a sorry thing for me that any one should have to overcome Prejudices in reading my Verses—that affects me more than any hypercriticism on any particular Passage. In *Endym-*

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ion I have most likely but moved into the Go-cart from the leading strings. In Poetry I have a few Axioms, and you will see how far I am from their Centre. 1st. I think Poetry should surprise by a fine excess and not by Singularity—it should strike the Reader as a wording of his own highest thoughts, and appear almost a Remembrance—2nd. Its touches of Beauty should never be half way thereby making the reader breathless instead of content: the rise, the progress, the setting of imagery should like the sun come natural to him—shine over him and set soberly although in magnificence leaving him in the Luxury of twilight—but it is easier to think what Poetry should be than to write it—and this leads me to another axiom. That if Poetry comes not as naturally as the Leaves to a tree it had better not come at all. However it may be with me I cannot help looking into new countries with ‘O for a Muse of fire to ascend!’¹.

To this passage the editor of the *Letters*, Maurice Buxton Forman, added a useful footnote:

‘Bailey informed Lord Houghton, “that one of Keats’s favourite topics of conversation was the principle of melody in verse, which he believed to consist in the adroit management of open and close vowels. He had a theory that vowels could be as skilfully combined and interchanged as differing notes of music, and that all sense of monotony was to be avoided, except when expressive of a special purpose. Uniformity of metre is so much the rule of English poetry, that, undoubtedly, the carefully varied harmonies of Keats’s verse were disagreeable, even to cultivated readers, often producing exactly the contrary expression from what was intended, and, combined as they were with rare and curious rhymes, diverted the attention from the beauty of the thoughts and the force of the imagery. In ‘Endymion’, indeed, there was much which

¹ *Letters*, I, 116–7.

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not only seemed, but was, experimental; and it is impossible not to observe the superior mastery of melody, and sure-footedness of the poetic paces, in 'Hyperion'.”

Endymion, a poem of 4,051 lines, was written between April and September, 1817, and published at the end of April, 1818, with an apologetic Preface. Keats called the poem 'a feverish attempt, rather than a deed accomplished'. He used the word 'mawkishness', which his critics were only too ready to adopt. The *Quarterly Review*'s article appeared in September, 1818, and on the ninth of October we find Keats writing calmly to James Augustus Hessey about the defects of the poem—'the slip-shod *Endymion*' he called it¹:

'It is as good as I had power to make it, by myself. Had I been nervous about its being a perfect piece, and with that view asked advice, and trembled over every page, it would not have been written; for it is not in my nature to fumble—I will write independently.—I have written independently *without Judgment*. I may write independently, and *with Judgment* hereafter. The Genius of Poetry must work out its own salvation in a man: It cannot be matured by law and precept, but by sensation and watchfulness in itself. That which is creative must create itself.'² ✓

This passage, and particularly the last sentence, is sufficient to identify Keats with the romantic principle. This principle was the basis of his own dissatisfaction with *Endymion*, and it becomes of the greatest interest, therefore, to trace the further evolution of his poetic practice.

¹ But in April (in a letter to John Taylor, his publisher), he had professed himself satisfied—'the book pleased me much—it is very free from faults; and although there are one or two words I should wish replaced, I see in many places an improvement greatly to the purpose.' (*Letters*, I, 145). But Keats is perhaps speaking here of the typographical appearance of the book.

² *Letters*, I, 242–3.

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If we ask ourselves what is the main defect of *Endymion*, we might agree that it is its diffuseness, its lack of a clear narrative line, of a precisely composed picture, of all the virtues which give great poetry its condensed clarity, its effect of a ‘crystallization’ of thought. If we then seek the cause of this diffuseness, I do not think that we should dispute that it arises in the process of swift facile rhyming. The composition jumps swiftly from rhyme to rhyme, and through keeping his eye on his steps, rather than raised to a particular direction, the poet travels in random curves. Take, for example, the description of Endymion in Book II (387–427):

*After a thousand mazes overgone,
At last, with sudden step, he came upon
A chamber, myrtle wall'd, embowered high,
Full of light, incense, tender minstrelsy,
And more of beautiful and strange beside:
For on a silken couch of rosy pride,
In midst of all, there lay a sleeping youth
Offondest beauty; fonder, in fair sooth,
Than sighs could fathom, or contentment reach:
And coverlids gold-tinted like the peach,
Or ripe October's faded marigolds,
Fell sleek about him in a thousand folds—
Not hiding up an Apollonian curve
Of neck and shoulder, nor the tenting swerve
Of knee from knee, nor ankles pointing light;
But rather, giving them to the filled sight
Officiously. Sideway his face repos'd
On one white arm, and tenderly unclos'd,
By tenderest pressure, a faint damask mouth
To slumbery pout; just as the morning south
Disparts a dew-lipp'd rose. Above his head,
Four lily stalks did their white honours wed*

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To make a coronal; and round him grew
All tendrils green, of every bloom and hue,
Together intertwin'd and trammel'd fresh:
The vine of glossy sprout; the ivy mesh,
Shading its Ethiop berries; and woodbine;
Qf velvet leaves and bugle-blooms divine;
Convolvulus in streaked vases flush;
The creeper, mellowing for an autumn blush;
And virgin's bower, trailing airily;
With others of the sisterhood. Hard by,
Stood serene Cupids watching silently.
One, kneeling to a lyre, touch'd the strings,
Muffling to death the pathos with his wings; .
And, ever and anon, uprose to look
At the youth's slumber; while another took
A willow-bough, distilling odorous dew,
And shook it on his hair; another flew
In through the woven roof, and fluttering-wise
Rain'd violets upon his sleeping eyes.

This passage is as concrete and objective as any in the whole poem, but we may note how the image is blurred by irrelevances introduced for the sake of rhyme. After the two lines giving a fairly precise description of the chamber, we have the weak line:

And more of beautiful and strange beside

which adds nothing to the description, but provides a rhyme for 'pride' in the next line. Three lines below we have the unnecessary interpolation 'in fair sooth' to provide a rhyme for 'youth'. A peach must be introduced to rhyme with 'reach', but Keats evidently felt that the image was a cliché, so added the more original and precise simile of 'faded marigolds', which happily rhymed with the 'folds' of the cover-lids. And so on, throughout the passage, rhymes are seen

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begetting images, images begetting rhymes; and the regular metre stretches over it all like a net whose every mesh must be filled with a duly accented syllable.

But this, it may be said, is how poetry is written—how Spenser wrote the *Fairie Queene*, how Shakespeare wrote *Venus and Adonis*, models which Keats had before him in composing *Endymion*. But for all its luscious monotony, its crystal brightness, the *Faerie Queene* can only be read intermittently, or as an academic exercise; and Shakespeare quickly abandoned the style of *Venus and Adonis*. For the same reasons Keats had to abandon a style too enervating for his energetic mind—a style which he felt deformed the poetic essence. He then turned to Milton as a model, and began his new long poem, *Hyperion*, in the unrhymed blank verse which Milton had used with such magical effect. With what result, we all know; Miltonics, as Keats called his new style, proved almost as unsatisfactory as the Spenserian style—indeed, the harm was much more insidious, for it was not a mere inflation of a natural mode of expression: it produced an organic deformation of language itself. The words in which Keats confessed his defeat (from a letter to John Hamilton Reynolds, post-marked 22 September, 1819) are again well-known, but they may be recalled for they gain significance in our particular context:

'I have given up Hyperion—there were too many Miltonic inversions in it—Miltonic verse cannot be written but in an artful or rather artist's humour. I wish to give myself up to other sensations. English ought to be kept up.'

And he then admits that he himself cannot distinguish, in *Hyperion*, between 'the false beauty proceeding from art' and 'the true voice of feeling'.¹

With this statement one should compare a similar passage from the long journal-letter written to George and Georgiana

¹ *Letters*, II, 419.

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Keats—this part of the letter apparently written on the same day as the letter to Reynolds:

'I shall never become attached to a foreign idiom so as to put it into my writings. *The Paradise Lost* though so fine in itself is a corruption of our Language—it should be kept as it is unique—a curiosity—a beautiful and grand Curiosity. The most remarkable Production of the world: A northern dialect accommodating itself to greek and latin inversions and intonations.'¹

In both letters he gives as a contrast to Milton, and as a genuine example of English poetic idiom, Thomas Chatterton. 'He is the purest writer in the English Language. He has no French idiom, or particles like Chaucer—'tis genuine English Idiom in English words.' And again: 'The purest English I think—or what ought to be the purest—is Chatterton's. The language had existed long enough to be entirely uncorrupted of Chaucer's gallicisms, and still the old words are used. Chatterton's language is entirely northern. I prefer the native music of it to Milton's cut by feet. I have but lately stood on my guard against Milton. Life to him would be death to me. Miltonic verse cannot be written but in the verse of art. I wish to devote myself to another sensation.'

This denial or renunciation of Milton has seemed treacherous to most critics, so before we go on to observe the next and final stage of Keats's development, we should ask whether he meant what he said, and if the first version of *Hyperion* bears out his self-criticism.

Robert Bridges, who had a great admiration for Keats, as well as for Milton, thought that Keats was deceiving himself—that he was offering a superficial excuse for difficulties and defects of deeper seating. Bridges could admit the defects of *Endymion*:

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'To one who expects to be carried on by the interest of the story, this poem is tedious and unreadable, and parts of it merit at least some of the condemnation which fell on the whole. Keats thought to "surprise by a fine excess"; his excess rather confuses and blurs, and it is a severe task to keep the attention fixed. A want of definition in the actual narration,—so that important matters do not stand out,—a sameness in the variety, and the reiteration of languid epithets, are the chief causes of this . . .'¹

Bridges's argument is that the defects of *Hyperion* are essentially of the same nature. It is not a question of style—the style, on the contrary, makes this poem 'the only poem since Milton that has seriously challenged the epic place'. What is wrong is that 'the subject lacks the solid basis of outward event, by which epic maintains its interest: like *Endymion*, it is all imagination . . . there is little but imagination, and a one-sidedness or incompleteness of that; a languor which lingers in the main design, though the influence of Milton is generally uplifting the language.'²

This attempt to divorce subject and style does not strike me as good critical procedure: it implies that a good story would support a bad style—that Miltonics or any other imitative style would not have mattered if the plot of *Hyperion* had been good enough. I would rather take the opposite view: like the music critic (I think it was Edward Dent) who said he did not mind what language an opera was sung in, so long as he did not understand it; so I would say that I am indifferent to the meaning or significance of a poet's story so long as the language is genuinely poetic. As an example of this extreme I would quote Pound's *Cantos*, which are hardly as perspicuous as *Hyperion*, but can be read with sustained poetic

¹ *Collected Essays and Papers, &c.* IV. 'A Critical Introduction to Keats'. Oxford University Press, 1929, p. 80.

² *Ibid.*, 106-7.

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enjoyment. Bridges assumed that what Keats mainly objected to in Milton was his inversions; and he advances a defence of inversion which shows once again (I am thinking of the obtuseness he displayed towards Hopkins's sprung rhythm) how far Bridges was from any understanding of the organic nature of poetic style. Inversion, he says,

'is of the essence of good style. In ordinary speech the words follow a common order prescribed by use, and if that does not suit the sense, correction is made by vocal intonation: but the first thing that a writer must do is to get his words in the order of his ideas, as he wishes them to enter the reader's mind; and when such an arrangement happens not to be the order of common speech, it may be called a grammatical inversion. To take the simple case, the position of the adjective with regard to its substantive: in French it generally follows the substantive, and this is in most cases its proper place, and for this reason alone descriptions of scenery are generally more pictorial in French prose than in English, the necessary frequent predicates being in their natural position: in English the common use sets the epithet before the object, and when this is a malposition of ideas, a poet must invert either his grammar or his ideas; and what is true of adjectives is true also of every word in the sentence.'¹

✓ It may be that we have here a perfect expression of the radical difference that separates the classical poet and critic from the romantic poet and critic. For what Bridges is asserting is the priority, in poetry, of idea or discursive thought, and the consequent adaptation of poetic diction to 'the order of ideas'. What the romantic poets and critics assert, from Coleridge to Pound, is the priority of the verbal symbol, of the expressive phrase, which is spontaneous in origin and therefore does not seek a logical order of words, but is uttered

¹ *Ibid.*, 108-9.

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as native, natural speech. Now, inversions are not altogether prohibited in natural speech: they are sometimes used instinctively for a particular expressive effect ('She's a beautiful girl, is Jane'; 'A common thief, that's what he is!'). But such natural inversions are rare, and are never a deliberate reshuffling of the natural order of words to fit a logical order of ideas, or a metrical pattern of syllables. They do not disrupt the native music, which is the true voice of feeling.

Let us now look more closely at the three stages in Keats's technical progress: the stages represented by *Endymion*, *Hyperion*, and *The Fall of Hyperion*. I have already quoted a passage from *Endymion* that is sufficiently representative. From *Hyperion* we might take the description of Hyperion at the end of Book II:

*It was Hyperion:—a granite peak
His bright feet touch'd, and there he stay'd to view
The misery his brilliance had betray'd
To the most hateful seeing of itself.
Golden his hair of short Numidian curl,
Regal his shape majestic, a vast shade
In midst of his own brightness, like the bulk
Of Memnon's image at the set of sun
To one who travels from the dusking East:
Sighs, too, as mournful as that Memnon's harp
He utter'd, while his hands contemplative
He press'd together, and in silence stood.
Despondence seiz'd again the fallen Gods
At sight of the dejected King of Day,
And many hid their faces from the light:
But fierce Enceladus sent forth his eyes
Among the brotherhood; and, at their glare,
Uprose Iäpetus, and Creüs too,
And Phorcus, sea-born, and together strode*

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To where he towered on his eminence.
There those four shouted forth old Saturn's name;
Hyperion from the peak loud answered, 'Saturn!'
Saturn sat near the Mother of the Gods,
In whose face was no joy, though all the Gods
Gave from their hollow throats the name of 'Saturn'!

From *The Fall of Hyperion* any twenty lines would reveal the drastic change of texture: I take the famous passage that follows the unveiling of Moneta, lines 256-82:

Then saw I a wan face,
Not pin'd by human sorrows, but bright blanch'd
By an immortal sickness which kills not;
It works a constant change, which happy death
Can put no end to; deathwards progressing
To no death was that visage; it had pass'd
The lily and the snow; and beyond these
I must not think now, though I saw that face—
But for her eyes I should have fled away.
They held me back, with a benignant light,
Soft-mitigated by divinest lids
Halfclosed, and visionless entire they seem'd
Of all external things—they saw me not,
But in blank splendor beam'd like the mild moon,
Who comforts those she sees not, who knows not
What eyes are upward cast. As I had found
A grain of gold upon a mountain's side,
And twing'd with avarice strain'd out my eyes
To search its sullen entrails rich with ore,
So at the view of sad Moneta's brow,
I ached to see what things the hollow brain
Behind enwombed: what high tragedy
In the dark secret Chambers of her skull
Was acting, that could give so dread a stress

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To her cold lips, and fill with such a light
Her planetary eyes; and touch her voice
With such a sorrow . . .

I am tempted to go on, to include such a magnificent line as:

The pale Omega of a wither'd race

or, five lines further on, the take-up of the familiar opening of *Hyperion*:

*Deep in the shady sadness of a vale,
Far sunken from the healthy breath of morn,
Far from the fiery noon and Eve's one star . . .*

What are the major changes of style between these three passages? Bridges has already indicated the most obvious one—the omission of all invocatives. In *The Fall of Hyperion* there is not a single invocative ‘O’, and Bridges shows how in comparable passages (*Hyperion*, I, 50–6 and *The Fall of Hyperion*, I, 352–8), the alterations are consequent on this change.

The vital changes, however, are more organic. The inversions have not gone—there is one in each of the first three lines of the passage quoted; there are nine or ten in 27 lines. A count in *Hyperion* would not yield a higher proportion, and I suspect that there are even less in *Endymion*. The excessive use of inversions in *Hyperion* comes from Milton: the most we might be able to claim for *The Fall of Hyperion* is that the inversions are generally determined by required emphasis, and not merely by the structure of a regular metre. But if we rewrite the first three lines of my quotation giving the words their natural order, what, if anything, is lost?

*Then I saw a wan face
Not pin'd by human sorrows, but blanch'd bright
By an immortal sickness which does not kill . . .*

I see no violence to ‘the order of ideas’ in such a restitution, and a positive gain in ease of diction.

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Miltonics, however, is more than a question of invocations and inversions:

*Golden his hair of short Numidian curl,
Regal his shape majestic, a vast shade
In midst of his own brightness, like the bulk
Of Memnon's image at the set of sun
To one who travels from the dusking East . . .*

This is magnificent, but it is not Keats; and Keats knew that he was merely relaying another poet's voice, another poet's personal accent. The abstract music of exotic proper names, the sonorous and jewelled epithets, the ruthless syntax—the verse of art, apt for imitation and elaboration, but not the true voice of feeling!

Miltonic verse is the individual voice of Milton, and Keats felt that he had fallen into the most insidious of all traps—the mimicry of personal idiosyncrasies. The weakness of *Endymion* had been his own weakness—'mawkishness' he called it; but we can now call it verbal excess, induced by the rhyming structure, and by imprecision of diction. In *Hyperion* Keats avoided these weaknesses, but only by sacrificing his own sincerity, his valid sensation. In *The Fall of Hyperion* he would devote himself to another sensation—that is to say, he would try to be true to his own poetic sensation. Keats knew that poetry had to be tested on the poet's own pulse—that it had an affective and visceral basis betrayed by any merely superficial affectation of a traditional style.

The style, the poetic diction and vocal accent, of *The Fall of Hyperion* is at last his own—free and individual, moving isometrically round the contour of his thought, revealing the sensational structure of his poetic experience. The lines I have quoted are illustration enough of this delicate fluctuant measure, but I cannot resist quoting a further half-dozen lines in

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which the accent itself almost makes visual the subject it describes:

*Then the tall shade, in drooping linens veil'd
Spake out, so much more earnest, that her breath
Stirr'd the thin folds of gauze that drooping hung
About a golden censer from her hand
Pendent; and by her voice I knew she shed . . .
Long-treasur'd tears.*

But here, and generally in *The Fall of Hyperion*, it is possible to detect another, remoter accent. At the same time that Keats was rejecting Milton, he was absorbing Dante. In the same letter to George and Georgiana from which I have already quoted, he tells that he has been reading Italian—Ariosto and Dante—but defiantly asserts that he will ‘never become attach’d to a foreign idiom so as to put it into (his) writings’. Bridges, in the essay already referred to, makes a good deal of this point:

‘And besides this conscious correction of old faults, it is now for the first time that the influence of Dante appears, and that not merely in the gravity of the vision in this poem, which is unlike any other of his embodiments, and in the sort of connection conceived between his vision of doom and his own experience and poetic meaning, all of which he might have come at through a translation, but in echoes of the Italian balance in passages where the sense is like Dante’s, as in this—

*High prophetess, said I, purge off,
Benign, if so it please thee, my mind’s film.*

And also where there is only the indefinable and individual touch to point to, as in—

*When in mid-day the sickening east wind
Shifts sudden to the south, the small warm rain
Melts out the frozen incense from all flowers,*

‘where the last line shows that Keats has now added to his

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style a mastery of Dante's especial grace: and such passages as this, or again as when he calls written words

The shadows of melodious utterance,

'which is also Dantesque in thought, should, I think, have forbidden the later critics, who knew from external evidence when the *Revision* was written, from judging that the new style came from decay of poetic power.'¹

It will be seen that Bridges regards this 'attachment to a foreign idiom' with favour—it is an acquired mastery of a special grace, Dante's grace, and Keats is honoured by the theft. We must not carry the demand for integrity too far; and we might admit that a personal style can absorb 'especial graces' and still remain predominantly personal. A question of affinity is involved. I do not think there was much affinity between the minds of Milton and Keats. Milton was ridden by his daemon: his utterance is positive and portentous. Keats had 'no identity'; was 'continually in for (?) informing) and filling some other Body'. To be identified with Milton was to be identified with a foreign body ('life to him would be death to me'); to be identified with Dante was to be identified with a sympathetic and familiar body. We do not, properly speaking, *imitate* identities: we fall into step with our fellow spirits. Bridges finds the 'indefinable and individual touch' of the lines about the 'small warm rain' that 'melts out the frozen incense from all flowers' Dantesque. For my part, I find them very English and Keatsian. I am reminded of that most English of all lyrical utterances:

*Western wind, when wilt thou blow,
The small rain down can rain?*

And of 'The Unquiet Grave':

*The wind doth blow to-day, my love,
And a few small drops of rain.*

¹ *Op. cit.*, 113-4.

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The *thought* of calling written words 'the shadows of melodic utterance' may be Dantesque, but the expression, if not Keatsian, is Spenserian or Shakespearean.

This distinction, between the imitation of turns of thought, or conceits, and the imitation of verbal expression, is perhaps unduly subtle. I do not know what a critic like Leone Vivante¹ would make of it, for to him there would be no distinction between originality of thought and originality of expression: to be original in diction, the thought itself would have to be original, or at least, authentically re-thought. But most of us, I think, would admit a variety of authentic expressions of the same thought. The ambiguity lies in the expression 'turn of thought'; for 'thought' acquires a subtle inflection from the manner in which it is expressed, and Bridges is implying that Keats imitated Dante's inflections rather than the main substance of his thought. I am not very convinced myself, but the problem should be discussed with wider reference to such Dantesque poems as Shelley's 'Triumph of Life' and the second movement of Eliot's 'Little Gidding'.

Before leaving *The Fall of Hyperion* I would like to point to two or three passages which seem to me to stand out with startling originality. We should bear in mind that we are quoting from a poem contemporary with the 'Ode to Melancholy' and 'To Autumn' (poems which have a wealth of traditional beauty), and then compare such phrases as I emphasize in these lines:

the scenes

*Still swooning vivid through my globed brain
With an electoral changing misery . . .*

or:

*Still fix'd he sat beneath the sable trees,
Whose arms spread straggling in wild serpent forms,*

¹ See his *Notes on the Originality of Thought* (1939) and his *English Poetry and its Contribution to the Knowledge of a Creative Principle* (1950).

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With leaves all hush'd: his awful presence there
(Now all was silent) gave a deadly lie
To what I erewhile heard: only his lips
Trembled amid the white curls of his beard.

or:

... so also shudders he:
Not at dog's howl, or gloom-bird's Even screech,
Or the familiar visitings of one
Upon the first toll of his passing bell;
But horrors, portion'd to a giant nerve
Make great Hyperion ache.

These, and many other separate lines and passages, are neither Miltonic nor Dantesque, neither Spenserian nor Shakespearean; they are the authentic voice of Keats's own feeling. Why, then, was the poem given up? Bridges would have it that there was a fundamental defect of organization—‘the subject lacks the solid basis of outward event, by which epic maintains its interest . . . the poem (he is speaking of the first version) fails in conduct’[✓] Whatever mental qualities go to make a born artist, none is more essential than an unconscious enthralment to his creative conception. When any true and sane artist has strayed into a fault that falsifies his conception, then his inspiration comes to a stand[✓]. The explanation is ingenious, but I doubt if it is the real one. We must remember Keats's tragic circumstances at the time: his hopeless, consuming passion for Fanny Brawne, the shadow of death that deepened every day. Poetry was a ‘feverous relief’ from such worries; ‘abstractions’ were ‘his only life’ (expressions from his letter to Reynolds of September 21 or 22, 1818). ‘There is an awful warmth about my heart like a load of Immortality’. These phrases were written during the composition of the first *Hyperion*, but they continue in the same strain, and with increased cause, during the period of the

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composition of *The Fall of Hyperion*. Middleton Murry, in an Appendix to his *Keats and Shakespeare*¹, has shown very convincingly that Keats's failure to complete the poem was a physical failure—a constitutional inability which Keats himself called 'idleness', but which we might call despair. In spite of the factual details, Mr Murry must nevertheless, in the main text of his book, give us a reason which is somewhat mystical:

'Keats abandoned the revised *Hyperion* because he was committing the sin of uttering soul-knowledge through an effort of mind-knowledge. That is a sin absent from the Decalogue, and unknown to ordinary experience; it is known only to poetic genius: it consists in the effort to utter what can only be revealed. It is in some sort a betrayal of the soul's knowledge, it is also a betrayal of the soul itself.'²

But in the same paragraph Mr Murry admits that 'at the moment that (Keats) was trying to shut out of his heart and mind Fanny and the world of men and women he was trying also to utter his knowledge that all things must be accepted. He was trying to deny and accept at once'. And in a footnote Mr Murry tries to illuminate this tangle:

'It is impossible to interrupt the narrative (and run the risk of mystifying the reader) by insisting once more upon what I believe to be true—namely, that the second *Hyperion* could not have been completed *as that poem*. It must necessarily have changed into something quite different. The visions and actions of the deified Apollo could have been none other than the visions and actions of the future Keats—that is to say, his unwritten poems and plays. This may be called a transcendental criticism: the name is unimportant, provided the criticism is a true one.'³

¹ Oxford University Press, 1925.

² *Op. cit.*, p. 169.

³ *Op. cit.* p. 235

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The criticism I have been indulging in is not transcendental: it is merely technical. All I am concerned to establish, with reference to the second version of *Hyperion*, is that it represents an advance in Keats's poetic diction, and that it was not abandoned for technical reasons. The reasons given by Bridges are conceptual: Keats had bitten off more than he could chew, to express it vulgarly. That, I think, Mr Murry would most vehemently deny; and if Bridges means that Keats did not have a technique adequate to his conception, I too would deny such a charge. What Mr Murry is saying, transcendental criticism apart, is that Keats had got himself into a mood in which he could not continue that particular poem. He quotes 'the terrible lines' that reveal this mood:

*Oftentimes I pray'd
Intense, that Death would take me from the vale
And all its burthens—Gasping with despair
Of change, hour after hour I curs'd myself.*

'The mood betrays the vision'. Perhaps, but the mood was induced, not by metaphysical speculation, nor by a sense of creative inadequacy, but by the pressure of outward circumstance. Let us state the matter plainly: an unfrustrated, physically capable Keats would have carried *The Fall of Hyperion* to a triumphant conclusion.

Though we must, with Middleton Murry, regard *The Fall of Hyperion* as 'the profoundest and most sublime' of Keats's poems, the fact remains, and remains to be considered, that at the moment he abandoned this poem, he wrote another poem which is generally regarded as his masterpiece: the 'Ode to Autumn'. Mr Murry calls this poem Shakespearean—'Shakespearean in its rich and opulent serenity of mood, Shakespearean in its lovely and large periodic movement, like the drawing of a deep full breath . . . this is natural and spontaneous poetic power'. I have no desire to challenge this judg-

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ment, though I think there is more of Chatterton than of Shakespeare in the poem—the Chatterton of ‘the purple plum’d maccaws’ and of ‘the fragrant scented thorn’ that ‘trembles with the gummy dew’, as well as the Chatterton of those ‘limpid and lovely’ lines which Mr Murry does admit into comparison:

*When Autumn blake and sun-brente do appear
With his gold hand gilding the falling leaf
Bringing up winter to fulfil the year
Bearing upon his back the ripéd sheaf;
When all the hills with woody seed is white;
When levin-fires and lemes do meet from far the sight;*

*When the fair apple, ruddy as even sky,
Do bend the tree unto the fructile ground:
When juicy pears and berries of black dye
Do dance in air, and call the eyne around;
Then, be the even foul, or even fair,
Methinks my heartes joy is steyncéd with some care.*

There is even in the ‘Ode’ something of the Milton of ‘Lycidas’, though nothing of the Milton of *Paradise Lost*. If it does represent a return to Shakespeare, it is not to the Shakespeare of *Lear* and *The Tempest*, though possibly to the Shakespeare of *Anthony and Cleopatra*—‘colour’d with magnificence’.¹ *The Eve of St. Agnes*, which also belongs to this Shakespearean ‘return’, returns to the still earlier Shakespeare of *Venus and Adonis*. But in *The Fall of Hyperion* Keats had advanced beyond these models, and this being granted, the Odes and *The Eve of St. Agnes* are to be regarded, not so much as a return, but as a reaction—as a failure of nerve, as ‘false beauty proceeding from art’ and not as ‘the true voice of feeling’. To place the ‘Ode to Melancholy’ in a poetic category somewhat

¹ The phrase Keats used of this play in a letter to Haydon (10 April, 1818).

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lower than *The Fall of Hyperion* is to go against the general consensus of opinion. What is different in kind is not necessarily different in degree. But looking to the future, from the standpoint of Keats's last technical efforts, the 'Ode' has a weedy if luscious progeny; whereas *The Fall of Hyperion*, in the organic vitality of its structure, points forward to 'The Windhover' and *The Waste Land*.

CHAPTER IV

Inscape and Gestalt: Hopkins

... is immortal diamond.

HOPKINS

Now that we possess the Letters and Notebooks of Gerard Manley Hopkins, we can see how decisively his discussion of poetic diction—a discussion carried on largely in private—anticipates, surpasses and eliminates most of the theoretical criticism of the nineteenth century. His practice of poetry substantiates his theories. The important documents are his letters to Baillie of September 10, 1864 (*Further Letters*, 68–76), a ‘Platonic Dialogue’ on ‘The Origin of Beauty’ (*Notebooks*, 54–91), an essay on ‘Poetic Diction’ (*Notebooks*, 92–4), some notes for a lecture on ‘Rhythm and the other Structural Parts of Rhetoric-Verses’ (*Notebooks*, 221–48), and the ‘Author’s Preface’ to his *Poems* (*Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, 3rd edition, 5–10). But many passages of criticism and elucidation are scattered throughout the three volumes of letters and the Notebooks. The poems themselves contain crystalline thoughts on the poet’s art.

In 1864 ‘a horrible thing’ had happened to Hopkins—he had ‘begun to doubt Tennyson’. He had been ‘meditating an essay . . . on some points of poetical criticism’, and in the process he had composed his thoughts on Tennyson. He proceeds to divide ‘the language of verse’ into three kinds:

‘The first and highest is poetry proper, the language of inspiration. The word inspiration need cause no difficulty. I mean by it a mood of great, abnormal in fact, mental acute-

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ness, either energetic or receptive, according as the thoughts which arise in it seem generated by a stress and action of the brain, or to strike into it unasked. This mood arises from various causes, physical generally, as good health or state of the air or, prosaic as it is, length of time after a meal . . . the poetry of inspiration can only be written by poets themselves. Everybody of course has like moods, but not being poets what they then produce is not poetry.¹ ✓

There is an entry in the *Notebooks* on February 9, 1868, which elaborates in some detail this conception of energetic or receptive states of mental awareness. I do not think we need bring it into this context except to observe that Hopkins finds some relationship between a state of contemplative awareness and 'an intellectual attraction for very sharp and pure dialectic or, in other matter, hard and telling art-forms'. We might say, to summarize this part of Hopkins's theory, that aesthetic perception is intrinsically a clarification of form; and the form in verse is what has been called the 'sound-look' of a group of words.² ✓

✓ The second kind of verse Hopkins called *Parnassian*. 'It can only be spoken by poets, but it is not in the highest sense poetry: It does not require the mood of mind in which the poetry of inspiration is written. It is spoken *on and from the level* of a poet's mind, not, as in the other case, when the inspiration, which is the gift of genius, raises him above himself...' ✓

'Parnassian then is that language which genius speaks as fitted to its exaltation, and place among other genius, but does not sing . . . in its flights. Great men, poets I mean, have each their own dialect as it were of Parnassian, formed generally as

¹ *Further Letters*, 69.

² Cf. *The Structure of Poetry*, by Elizabeth Sewell. London (Routledge and Kegan Paul), 1950, p. 14 and *passim*.

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they go on writing, and at last,—this is the point to be marked,—they can see things in the Parnassian way and describe them in this Parnassian tongue, without further effort of inspiration. In a poet's particular kind of Parnassian lies most of his style, of his manner, of his mannerism if you like.'

Hopkins then illustrates his point by a quotation from Tennyson's *Enoch Arden*, and then continues:

'I believe that when a poet palls on us it is because of his Parnassian. We seem to have found out his secret. Now in fact we have not found out more than this, that when he is not inspired and in his flights, his poetry does run in an intelligibly laid down path.'

—a path, that is to say, which lacks the element of surprise, of originality.

Hopkins ends his analysis by distinguishing 'a higher sort of Parnassian' which he calls *Castalian*:

'There is a higher sort of Parnassian which I call *Castalian*, or it may be thought the lowest kind of inspiration. Beautiful poems may be written wholly in it. Its peculiarity is that though you can hardly conceive yourself having written in it, if in the poet's place, yet it is too characteristic of the poet, too so-and-so-all-over-ish, to be quite inspiration. E.g.

Yet despair

*Touches me not, though pensive as a bird
Whose vernal coverts winter hath laid bare.*

‘This is from Wordsworth, beautiful, but rather too essentially Wordsworthian, too persistently his way of looking at things. The third kind is merely the language of verse as distinct from that of prose, Delphic, the tongue of the Sacred Plain, I may call it, used in common by poet and poetaster.’

And then as an afterthought, Hopkins adds that there is also *Olympian*, ‘the language of strange masculine genius which

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suddenly, as it were, forces its way into the domain of poetry, without naturally having a right there'. Not a very clear category, but Rossetti's 'Blessed Damozel' is given as an example of it.

It may seem that Hopkins is here merely distinguishing various degrees of poetic intensity, the extremes becoming a difference in kind. He is vague about these extremes, but very illuminating in his definition of the intermediate Parnassian, 'the language and style of poetry mastered and at command but employed without any fresh inspiration'. His instances come from Tennyson and Wordsworth, but there are few poets, apart from Shakespeare ('He does use some, but little'), who avoid this process of self-imitation. For that is what it amounts to: the most important word in the definition of Parnassian is the limiting word 'fresh'—poetic interest, poetic vitality, is sustained only by inexhaustible freshness of inspiration, by originality in expression. To be originative (of linguistic symbols and images)—that is the final test of poetic greatness; and that is what Keats too had realized, though Hopkins does not mention him in this context. But he does mention Shakespeare: Shakespeare does not pall 'because he uses so little Parnassian'. 'Inconsequent conclusion: Shakespeare is and must be utterly the greatest of poets.'

To the quality of originality or freshness corresponds the effect of sincerity: the test is that in reading or listening to poetry we should be 'touched', or 'moved' (words which carry a physical implication). This can be achieved either by the image conveyed by words, or by the sound of the words: in the highest form of poetry, by both means simultaneously.

The selection of images, and their metaphorical conjunction, is an innate talent or 'gift': a process, no doubt neural in its constitution, which we are not able to analyse. On its possession, as Aristotle long ago observed, the highest kind of poetry depends. But equally essential is the ability to compose

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words in a significant pattern: the image is sterile unless it can be 'realized', made concrete in words which have a sensational equivalence to the image (if a concept is involved the process is still more complicated, for the concept must first be realized as image, and the image then realized or 'expressed' sensationally—the lines quoted by Hopkins from Wordsworth above (page 78) are a good illustration. This act of realization, the 'essential and only lasting thing in poetry', Hopkins called 'inscaping'. ✓

The question that Hopkins then raised was the same question that Coleridge and Keats had raised—was such a significant pattern in poetry superimposed by the poet, or was it automatically induced by the particular mental event. Hopkins came to the same conclusion as Coleridge: the form proceeds from the feeling—it is organic, 'the *native rhythm* of the words used bodily imported into verse' (*Letters to Robert Bridges*, 46). To substantiate his intuitive grasp of this process, Hopkins studied English verse in its origins, in its development, in all its variety, and he came to the conclusion that the native rhythm had been lost during the Elizabethan period through the imitation of Italian and French models—'Greene being the last writer who can be said to have recognised it'. ✓

Hopkins's distinctions between Running Rhythm, or Standard Rhythm, and Sprung Rhythm, or Natural Rhythm, are clearly expressed in his 'Preface', and I need not repeat them here. When 'sprung' rhythm is called 'natural' rhythm, we have said all that is necessary to be said about it, and our analyses into falling feet and falling rhythms, rocking feet and rhythms, and counterpointed rhythm, are merely pedantic descriptions to cover all the varieties of organic expression. It is true, of course, that great poetry, such as Hopkins's own best poetry, embodies more conscious skill than expressions like 'native rhythm' and 'organic expression' might imply. In any successful poem there is, as Dr Gardner rightly claims

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in his Introduction to the third edition of the *Poems*, ‘a total complex of style, in which the natural strong beat of the freer kinds of English verse is reinforced by alliteration, assonance, internal rhyme, and half-rhyme, these devices being used not casually, but with a deliberate sense of design, so that the whole pattern and texture of the poetry is enriched (for those who like it) by subtle scales and harmonies built up with vowels and consonants; and the most beautiful effects are achieved when the “linked sweetness” of the “lettering” breaks across the semantic pauses yet still echoes and fetches out the interior movement of thought and emotion.... Without the strictest architectonic and elaborate phonal devices which Hopkins employs, Sprung Rhythm tends to degenerate into doggerel or even bad prose.’ But this is another way of stating that the symbolic form of a poem is often complex, and is most complex when, as in ‘The Wreck of the *Deutschland*’, such a free flexibility of rhythm flows through a fixed stanzaic pattern.¹ The result is a tension in which meaning may be stretched or compressed to a degree of arbitrary obscurity. Sprung rhythm for its finest and clearest effects requires the irregular structure of ‘The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo’.

Rhythmic form, in any case, is subordinate to what Hopkins called ‘inscape’—‘the very soul of art’. He seems to have derived this notion from Duns Scotus’s doctrine of *haecceitas* or ‘thusness’, the principle of individuation, but Parmenides was also an inspiration (see the early essay on this philosopher in the *Notebooks*, 98–102). Inscape is what is individually distinctive of a thing, of a situation, image or form. ‘As air, melody, is what strikes me most of all in music, and design in painting, so design, pattern, or what I am in the habit of calling “inscape” is what I above all aim at in poetry.’ There seems to me to be little doubt that what Hopkins called ‘in-

¹ A ‘counterpoint’ exploited to much greater effect by Miss Marianne Moore.

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scape' may be identified with the 'Gestalt' (configuration) of modern psychologists, and it was not a passing idea with Hopkins, but part of a private and systematic terminology which included such related words (often used indifferently as substantives or verbs) as 'scape', 'stress' and 'instress', 'stall' and 'install', 'inlaw' and 'inset'. Other variations are: 'off-scape', 'outscape', 'outstress', 'forestall', 'forepitch', 'splay' and 'display', 'quain', 'siding', 'burl' and 'cleave'. Such words constitute a vocabulary of form, of the morphology of beauty, which extends in an ascending scale from the minute particulars of natural forms (as in leaves and flowers) to composition in the arts and even to a transcendental grace of graces.

The meaning of inscape is best illustrated in Hopkins's use of the word. He will use it to describe a bluebell ('the inscape of the flower most finely carried out in the siding of the axes, each striking a greater and greater slant'), or an ash-tree ('the ash-tree growing in the corner of the garden was felled. It was lopped first: I heard the sound and looking out and seeing it maimed there came at that moment a great pang and I wished to die and not to see the inscapes of the world destroyed any more'), of architecture ('the strong and noble inscape of the pointed arch'), of a sky ('I looked long up at it till the tall height and the beauty of the scaping . . . had strongly grown on me . . . Unless you refresh the mind from time to time you cannot always remember or believe how deep the inscape is'), of painting (Alma Tadema: 'A master of scaping rather than of inscape', 'Mantegna's inscaping of drapery . . . is, I think, unequalled, it goes so deep'), of a horse ('caught that inscape in the horse that you see in the pediment especially and other basreliefs of the Parthenon . . . I looked at the groin or the flank and saw how the set of the hair symmetrically flowed outwards from it to all parts of the body, so that, following that one may inscape the whole beast very simply'), of a philosopher (Parmenides: 'his feeling for instress, for the flush

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and foredawn, for inscape'), and of man ('The way men judge in particular is determined for each by his own inscape'). But the closest application of the term is to poetry, and here we must examine a longer statement. It comes from the essay on 'Poetry and Verse' included in the *Notebooks* (p. 249):

✓ Poetry is speech framed for contemplation of the mind by the way of hearing or speech framed to be heard for its own sake and interest over and above its interest of meaning. Some matter or meaning is essential to it but only as an element necessary to support and employ the shape which is contemplated for its own sake. (Poetry is in fact speech only employed to carry the inscape of speech for the inscape's sake—and therefore the inscape must be dwelt on. Now if this can be done without repeating it *once* of the inscape will be enough for art and beauty and poetry but then at least the inscape must be understood as so standing by itself that it could be copied and repeated. If not, repetition, *oftening, over-and-overing, aftering* of the inscape must take place in order to detach it to the mind and in this light poetry is speech which afters and oftens its inscape, speech couched in a repeating figure and verse is spoken sound having a repeating figure.) Verse is (inscape of spoken sound, not spoken words, or speech employed to carry the inscape of spoken sound—or in the usual words) speech wholly or partially repeating the same figure of sound. Now there is speech which wholly or partially repeats the same figure of grammar and this may be framed to be heard for its own sake and interest over and above its interest of meaning. Poetry then may be couched in this, and therefore all poetry is not verse but all poetry is either verse or falls under this or some further development of what verse is, speech wholly or partially repeating some kind of figure which is over and above meaning, at least the grammatical, historical, and logical meaning.'

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This is somewhat obscure: it may be a little clearer if we try to rephrase it in a more contemporary terminology. Hopkins is saying that poetry (as distinct from verse) is speech given a form or pattern (*Gestalt*) to be contemplated for its own sake, or for its symbolic significance, rather than for any discursive meaning. The poetry is in the form, in the inscape, and is an intensification or patterning of speech. When thus intensified the form of speech can be heard for its own sake and interest over and above its interest of meaning. But if instead of this intensification or crystallization of speech (*inscaping*), which is sufficient in itself and in one instance to constitute *poetry*, the same pattern of sound is repeated without inscape, then we get *verse*. Generally speaking (and this differentiates his theory and practice from later 'free verse') Hopkins insists on the need for a repetition of the form or figure in poetry as well as in verse—he did not see how the form as such could otherwise be 'realized' and *detached*, as it were, from the unique utterance—it only becomes evident if repeated at least once. Poetry is repeated pattern, and 'parallelism in expression tends to beget or passes into parallelism in thought'. At the same time, Hopkins admitted that 'we must not insist on knowing where verse ends and prose (or verseless composition) begins, for they pass into one another' (*Notebooks*, 221); and he admitted that a *figure of grammar* might replace the figure of spoken sound, as happens in Hebrew poetry. In effect, the general result of the various 'licences and departures' allowed to the poet is to leave only a myth of repeating pattern: a trellis of dead wood buried beneath the organic growth of the poetry.

In all that concerns prosody, its history and science, there is much in Hopkins's *Notebooks* and Letters that is both learned and sensitive; and his appreciation (or depreciation) of individual poets is always lively. But we can learn more from his own practice of poetry—from those forty-eight

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poems of the 1918 edition, and from the more numerous early poems and fragments since added to the collection. Two characteristics of his own practice, not noticeably emphasized in his discussions of poetry, stand out: his realism, and his use of rare or newly compounded words. By his realism I mean no more than his use of an acute observation of natural phenomena. There is scarcely a poem, even one on an abstract theme, that does not embody some freshly-seen or freshly-felt object. Thus in the sonnet on Patience (No. 70), patience is compared to ivy which ‘basks / Purple eyes and seas of liquid leaves all day’—far-fetched but vividly appropriate. His neologisms, which always have some etymological justification, and are often an attempt to revive lost meanings or extend present meanings, should sometimes have been, as Bridges noted, ‘forbidden by homophonic absurdities’—for example, ‘as skies betweenpie mountains’, where ‘betweenpie’ is a verb compounded of ‘between’ and ‘pie’, ‘pie’ being derived from ‘pied’, as in pied piper, meaning parti-coloured. (Cf. Milton: ‘Meadows trim with Daisies pied’.). But for one absurdity of this kind there are a dozen happy inventions or uses, such as ‘wanwood’ and ‘leafmeal’—

*nor spare a sigh
Though worlds of wanwood leafmeal lie.*

But Hopkins’s greatest inventions are in the ‘inscape’ of his poems—that total complex of image and rhythm and sound resolved into an intricate but infrangible form. The technical miracle among his poems seems to me to be ‘The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo’, where the vortex of the rhythm sweeps all ghosts of repetitive pattern into a single fused cadence—or rather, into two antiphonal cadences. Comparable to this miracle is poem No. 72—‘That Nature is a Herac-litean Fire and of the comfort of the Resurrection’, and his all but last recorded and unfinished poem, the ‘Epithalamion’ of

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1888 (No. 121). Such poems as these were made known to the world ten or more years after the first English experiments in free verse (imagism), but were then seen to have anticipated by twenty years most of the technical discoveries of that time.

✓ Hopkins's inscape, the individually expressive form of his poems, is so close to the very make of the man that he has proved a difficult (because too obvious) poet to imitate. Nevertheless his influence has been considerable. Some critics would complain that it had been invariably unfortunate, but I would say that in one case, that of Dylan Thomas, fire answered Heraclitean fire, perhaps from a certain community of Celtic influences, influences which Hopkins acknowledged.¹ Thomas has his own inscape, and the poet of 'Fern Hill' and of 'In Country Sleep' has made and exhibits technical discoveries that owe nothing to Hopkins. But he must acknowledge a proud debt to Hopkins, as to a liberator.

¹ For evidence of Hopkins's Celtic Studies, see the letters from Dr John Rhys published in Appendix III of *Further Letters* (266-70).

CHAPTER V

The Figure of Grammar: Whitman and Lawrence

[i]

There remain, from the period of Hopkins, two or three poets whose cult of sincerity, though never completely successful, deserves a passing notice—in England, Arnold, Patmore and Bridges; in America, Whitman. Arnold and Bridges, from our point of view, are interesting only as failures: their works lifeless and inorganic experiments of minds essentially academic. Poems like Arnold's 'The Youth of Nature' and 'The Youth of Man' were presumably inspired by the Pindaric ode:

*Cold bubbled the spring of Tilphusa
Copais lay bright in the moon;
Helicon glass'd in the lake
Its firs, and afar, rose the peaks
Of Parnassus, snowily clear . . .*

This is merely a breaking of the rhythmic step: a syncopated metre, whose only originality lies in the ingenuity of its variations. There is no fresh inscape, no discovered form, no integrity of accent. 'The Strayed Reveller', based on the metrical freedom of the choruses of *Samson Agonistes*, is of more interest. Arnold succeeds in escaping from the metrical machinery of formal verse, and one's only complaint is that he does not quite succeed in creating an integral rhythmic structure:

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They see the Indian
Drifting, knife in hand,
His frail boat moor'd to
A floating isle thick matted
With large-leav'd, low-creeping melon-plants,
And the dark cucumber.
He reaps, and stows them,
Drifting—drifting:—round him,
Round his green harvest plot,
Flow the cool lake-waves:
The mountains ring them.

This is presumably constructed as a rocking-rhythm, each line containing two feet of two, three or four syllables separated by a caesura. Sometimes there are three feet. But there is no organic shape to the phrase; the break between the third and fourth line in the passage quoted, for example, is arbitrary. There is a certain freshness of imagery: it is a freshly seen landscape, and throughout the poem exotic *items* (rather than images) lie like jewels in the descriptive discourse. It is preferable to the Tennysonian equivalent—the smooth Parnassian of ‘The Hesperides’ or ‘The Lotus-eaters’. It is an early poem (1849), and Arnold was never to pursue this experimental vein—the rest of his poems are read, as Hopkins said, ‘with more interest than rapture . . . for they seem to have all the ingredients of poetry without quite being it—no ease or something or other . . . but still they do not leave off being, as the French say, very beautiful.’¹ But if it is a question of integrity, or, as we have been saying, of sincerity, then there is more of it in the work of Arnold’s friend, Arthur Hugh Clough, at any rate, in the *Bothie of Tober-na-Vuolich*. ‘The one infallible note of a true poet’, wrote Patmore in an essay on Clough, ‘the power of expressing himself in rhythmical

¹ *Further Letters*, 43 (No. XXVI, to Edward Bond, August 4, 1873).

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movements of subtlety and sweetness which baffle analysis'—this note, present in the *Bothie*, is absent in all Arnold's work, with the possible exception of 'Dover Beach'.¹

Patmore himself is almost the crux of our discussion, for no poet had a clearer understanding of poetic integrity, and no poet of the nineteenth century, Hopkins apart, struggled so ardently to achieve it. In an essay on 'Poetic Integrity' we find him celebrating the cult of sincerity with a perfect awareness of its consequences for the structure of poetry. Here is the concluding paragraph:

'The saying of Wordsworth concerning the Poet, that

*You must love him ere to you
He will seem worthy of your love,*

which at first reading sounds very much like nonsense, is absolutely true. He must have won your credit and confidence in his words, by proofs of habitual veracity and sincerity, before you can so receive the words which come from his heart that they will move your own. If, in the utterance of what he offers to you as the cry or the deep longing of passion, you catch him busily noticing trifles—for which very likely he gets praise—"accurate observation of nature"—you will put him down as one who knows nothing of the passion he is pretending to express. If you detect him in the endeavour to say "fine things" in order to win your admiration for himself, instead of rendering his whole utterance a single thing, which shall win your sympathy with the thought or feeling by which he declares himself to be dominated, the result will

¹ The *Bothie* is written in hexameters, but in hexameters which Arnold described as 'too rough and irregular'; he nevertheless praised the poem for 'the rapidity of its movement, and the plainness and directness of its style'. Arnold's essay *On Translating Homer*, from which these quotations come, is an important contribution to our discussion, for the qualities which Arnold was demanding in translation (plainness, fidelity, directness, etc.) are part of the general cult of sincerity.

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be the same; and also it will be if you discover that the beauty of his words is obtained rather by the labour of polish than by the inward labour and true finish of passion. When, on the other hand, some familiarity with the poet's work has assured you that, though his speech may be unequal and sometimes inadequate, it is never false; that he has always something to say, even when he fails in saying it: then you will not only believe in and be moved by what he says well; but when the form is sometimes imperfect you will be carried over such passages, as over thin ice, by the formative power of passion or feeling which quickens the whole; although you would reject such passages with disgust were they found in the writing of a man in whose thoughts you know that the manner stands first and the matter second.'¹

There may be some equivocation here, for if the formative power or passion has quickened the whole of a poem, it is difficult to see by what standards the poem is to be judged 'sometimes imperfect'—presumably by some standard of traditional form. But the intention of the passage is clear enough, and links Patmore to Coleridge and Keats in the development of an organic structure in poetry.

And yet the Patmorean 'ode', for all its integrity and force, is not a successful solution of the problem of poetic form. For its intrinsic weaknesses we may consult Hopkins's letters to Patmore, which though concerned with verbal and metrical detail, have a cumulative effect that is destructive (*Further Letters*, 188–203). There is an incidental remark which points to a more radical defect (p. 199): 'What I feel least at my ease about is a certain jesting humour, which does not seem to me quite to hit the mark in this profoundly delicate matter . . .' This 'jesting humour' deserves a stronger term, for it is an expression of the same 'indirectness' that Arnold rightly de-

¹ *Principle in Art, etc.* London (1889), 47–9.

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tected as a sign of falsity in Francis Newman's translation of the *Iliad*. Hopkins also accused Patmore of 'a great discrepancy of feeling', varying from animosity (as manifested towards Disraeli) to 'sweet inward pathos'. But in general Hopkins is a modest and deferential critic of his senior, and does not draw attention to what, considering his own concreteness of imagery, must have been for him Patmore's most obvious defect: his vague and wordy idealism. To take a few lines from a poem particularly admired by Hopkins—'Legem Tuam Dilexi':

*And the just Man does on himself affirm
God's limits, and is conscious of delight,
Freedom and right;
And so His Semblance is, Who, every hour,
By day and night,
Buildeth new bulwarks 'gainst the Infinite.
For, ah, who can express
How full of bonds and simpleness
Is God,
How narrow is He,
And how the wide, waste field of possibility
Is only trod
Straight to His homestead in the human heart,
And all His art
Is as the babe's that wins his Mother to repeat
Her little song so sweet!*

What images there are in such a passage are banal to the point of sentimentality; and what we have, apart from such images, is merely a sinuous threading of abstractions, pleasant enough on the tongue, but not biting into the mind.

As for Bridges, I do not believe that the concept of organic form ever entered his consciousness. Deep as was his understanding of classical and modern prosody, it was always to

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him a deliberate art or artifice; experiment was a game with fixed counters. He had a precise notion of metrical law which sometimes, as in ‘London Snow’, achieves a magical correspondence between meaning and movement; but his main experimental effort, *The Testament of Beauty*, must be regarded as a grotesque failure. Much of it is awkward:

‘Tis first to tell of Selfhood, since the first one thing,
if ever a first thing were, was of the Essence of Self...

much of it is trite:

And for their monarch Queen—an egg-casting machine,
hapless without attendance as a farmer’s drill
by bedels driven and gear’d and in the furrows steer’d,
well-watch’d the while, and treated with respect and care
as long as she run well, oil’d stoked and kept in trim;
but if deranged she slacken in her depositing,
she is dealt with as men scrap a worn-out seed-barrow,
not worth the mending; new machines cost nought to bees.

There may be some system in this verse, but it is one that deforms the native rhythm of speech and produces no compensating intensity of inscape.

[ii]

I would now like to discuss, but briefly in view of his main irrelevance, a poet whose mind Hopkins felt to be more like his own than that of any other man living—Walt Whitman.¹ The first edition of *Leaves of Grass* was published in Brooklyn in 1855, but it was not until William Michael Rossetti published a selection of Whitman’s poems in London in 1868 that his work began to enter the English poetic consciousness. An account of the growth of his reputation in England during the seventies would be of great interest. In 1882 Hopkins had

¹ Cf. *Letters to Robert Bridges*, 155.

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read 'half a dozen pieces at most'. 'This', he said, 'though very little, is quite enough to give a strong impression of his marked and original manner and the way of thought and in particular of his rhythm'. Bridges had thought he detected some influence of Whitman in 'The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo'. Never did he so completely betray his imperception of Hopkins's essential quality. But Hopkins answered him patiently: 'And first of the rhythm. Of course I saw that there was to the eye something in my long lines like his, that the one would remind people of the other. And both are in irregular rhythms. There the likeness ends. The pieces of his I read were mostly in an irregular rhythmic prose: that is what they are thought to be meant for and what they seemed to me to be.' Hopkins then takes a line of Whitman's and analyses its rhythm, to show how it differs from sprung rhythm, and concludes:

'Here then I must make the answer which will apply here and to all like cases and to the examples which may be found up and down the poets of the use of sprung rhythm—if *they could have done it they would*: sprung rhythm, once you hear it, is so eminently natural a thing and so effective a thing that if they had known of it they would have used it. . . . There is . . . no sign that Whitman means to use paeons or outriding feet where these breaks in rhythm occur; it seems to me a mere extravagance to think he means people to understand of themselves what they are slow to understand even when marked or printed out. If he does not mean it, then he does not do it; or in short what he means to write—and writes—is rhythmic prose and that only . . .

'Extremes meet, and (I must for truth's sake say what sounds pride) this savagery of his art, this rhythm in its last ruggedness and decomposition into common prose, comes near the last elaboration of mine. For that piece of mine is

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very highly wrought. The long lines are not rhythm run to seed: everything is weighed and timed in them . . .

And then, after some further remarks about his own practice, Hopkins concludes:

‘The above remarks are not meant to run down Whitman. His “savage” style has advantages, and he has chosen it; he says so. But you cannot eat your cake and keep it: he eats his off-hand, I keep mine . . .’

‘About diction the matter does not allow me so clearly to point out my independence as about rhythm. I cannot think that the present piece owes anything to him. I hope not, here especially, for it is not even spoken in my own person but in that of St. Winefred’s maidens. It ought to sound like the thoughts of a good but lively girl and not at all like—not at all like Walt Whitman.’¹

This disclaimer of Whitman’s influence may remind us of a similar and more recent one—Mr Eliot’s. In his Introduction to the *Selected Poems* of Ezra Pound,² he says, after speaking of Laforgue:

‘I did not read Whitman until much later in life, and had to conquer an aversion to his form, as well as to much of his matter, in order to do so. I am equally certain—it is indeed obvious—that Pound owes nothing to Whitman. This is an elementary observation; but in dealing with popular conceptions of *vers libre* one must still be as simple and elementary as fifteen years ago.’

These disclaimers should make it evident that Whitman, who has remained without technical progeny of importance (unless we count Edward Carpenter and D. H. Lawrence as technically important), is irrelevant to our whole debate. His

¹ *Loc. cit.*, 155–8.

² London (1928), viii–ix.

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verse is based on, and follows, the structure of Biblical or Hebrew poetry, whose essential form is, as Hopkins pointed out, a ‘figure of grammar’ rather than a ‘figure of spoken sound’. Hopkins defines a figure of grammar in the following way:

‘A figure of grammar can be shifted to other words with a change of specific meaning but keeping some general agreement, as of noun over against noun, verb against verb, assertion against assertion, etc., e.g. Foxes (A) have (B) holes (C) and birds of the air (A’) have (B—not B’ here) nests (C’), or more widely even than this / with a change of words but keeping the grammatical and logical meaning—as / Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests (that is / Beasts have homes to live in) but the Son of Man has not where to lay His head (that is / Man has not a home to live in): the subjects of the clauses being changed the one does no more than say yes, the other no.’¹

Whitman’s figures of grammar are not so simple as this Biblical example, but grammatical they are:

*As I ebb’d with the ocean of life,
As I wended the shores I know,
As I walk’d where the ripples continually wash you Paumanok,
Where they rustle up hoarse and sibilant,
Where the fierce old mother endlessly cries for her castaways,
I mused late in the autumn day, gazing off southward,
Held by this electric self out of the pride of which I utter poems,
Was seiz’d by the spirit that trails in the lines underfoot,
The rim, the sediment that stands for all the water and all the land of
the globe.*

A single sentence, it will be seen, depending for its structure, not on any inherent rhythm or spoken sound, but on a state-

¹ *Notebooks*, 221-2.

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ment with its qualifying and dependent clauses. The second stanza of this poem repeats the same structure:

*As I wend to the shores I know not,
As I list to the dirge, the voices of men and women wreck'd,
As I inhale the impalpable breezes that set in upon me,
As the ocean so mysterious rolls toward me closer and closer,
Etc.*

I have no desire to deny to Whitman his special virtues, but in so far as they are technical, they belong to the art of rhetoric rather than to the art of poetry. This distinction was recognized by Lawrence, though he gave it a different name. In his preface to the American edition of his *New Poems* (New York, 1920) he distinguishes between the voice of the past and the voice of the future, between the poetry of the beginning and of the end, which is the poetry of perfection; and the poetry of immediacy, of the present moment, which is his notion of free verse. ‘In the immediate present’, he writes, ‘there is no perfection, no consummation, nothing finished. The strands are all flying, quivering, intermingling into the web, the waters are shaking the moon. There is no round consummate moon on the face of the running water, nor on the face of the unfinished tide. There are no gems of the living plasm. The living plasm vibrates unspeakably, it inhales the future, it exhales the past, it is the quick of both, and yet it is neither . . . Life, the ever-present, knows no finality, no finished crystallization . . . Give me nothing fixed, set, static. Don’t give me the infinite or the eternal: nothing of infinity, nothing of eternity. Give me the still, white seething, the incandescence and the coldness of the incarnate moment: the moment, the quick of all change and haste and opposition: the moment, the immediate present, the Now.’ As a representative of this ‘unrestful, ungraspable poetry of the pure present, poetry whose very permanency lies in its wind-like transit’, Law-

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rence gives Whitman. ‘Whitman looked truly before and after. But he did not sigh for what is not. The clue to all his utterance lies in the sheer appreciation of the instant moment, life surging itself into utterance at its very well-head . . . Because Whitman put this into his poetry, we fear him and respect him so profoundly.’

Lawrence then proceeds to identify this poetry of the instant moment with free verse:

‘From the foregoing it is obvious that the poetry of the instant present cannot have the same body or the same motion as the poetry of the before and after. It can never submit to the same conditions. It is never finished. There is no rhythm which returns upon itself, no serpent of eternity with its tail in its own mouth. There is no static perfection, none of that finality we find so satisfying because we are so frightened.

‘Much has been written about free verse. But all that can be said, first and last, is that free verse is, or should be, direct utterance from the instant, whole man. It is the soul and the mind and body singing at once, nothing left out. They speak all together. There is some confusion, some discord. But the confusion and the discord only belong to the reality, as noise belongs to the plunge of water. It is no use inventing fancy laws for free verse, no use drawing a melodic line which all the feet must toe. Free verse toes no melodic line, no matter what drill-sergeant. Whitman pruned away his clichés—perhaps his clichés of rhythm as well as of phrase. And this is about all we can do, deliberately, with free verse. We can get rid of the stereotyped movements and the old hackneyed associations of sound and sense. We can break down those artificial conduits and canals through which we do so love to force our utterance. We can break the stiff neck of habit. We can be in ourselves spontaneous and flexible as flame, we can see that utterance rushes out without artificial form or arti-

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ficial smoothness. But we cannot positively prescribe any motion, any rhythm. All the laws we invent or discover—it amounts to pretty much the same—will fail to apply to free verse. They will only apply to some form of restricted, limited un-free verse . . . To break the lovely form of metrical verse, and to dish up the fragments as a new substance, called *vers libre*, this is what most free-versifiers accomplish. They do not know that free verse has its own *nature*, that it is neither star nor pearl, but instantaneous like plasm . . . It is the instant; the quick; the very jetting source of all will-be and has-been. The utterance is like a spasm, naked contact with all influences at once. It does not want to get anywhere. It just takes place.'

And finally:

'The most superb mystery we have hardly recognized: the immediate, instant self. The quick of all time is the instant. The quick of all the universe, of all creation, is the incarnate, carnal self. Poetry gave us the clue: free verse: Whitman. Now we know.'¹

Now we know that Lawrence identified free verse—the verse he himself wrote in his best poems—with Whitman. We must treat this as an assertion that he never proved. Let us return to the point from which we began this discussion: Coleridge's distinction between form as proceeding and shape as superinduced. There is no doubt that Lawrence (and Whitman) reject the superinduced shape of metrical laws. But Lawrence is asserting that what proceeds, spontaneously, has no recognizable or discoverable form. It is naked utterance, unformed.

I have already shown that what proceeds, in the case of Whitman, has a very positive structure, the figure of grammar, as Hopkins called it. Apart from this basic structure,

¹ *Phoenix*, 218–22.

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Whitman's verse is full of rhetorical devices which are anything but spontaneous—deliberate inversions such as:

Vigil strange I kept on the field one night;

artificial invocations, such as:

*O. a strange hand writes for our dear son, O stricken
mother's soul!*

and, further, all the deliberate antiphonal structure of poems like 'When Lilacs last in the Dooryard bloom'd' and 'Out of the Cradle endlessly rocking'. One could elaborate a treatise on rhetoric from Whitman's practice. As for Lawrence's own verse, we can distinguish at least three types: regular metrical verse, which he gradually abandoned; figures of grammar on the Whitmanesque model; and prose 'pansies', as he called them, of uninspired flatness. Instead of the immediate, instant self we have the conscious, rhetorical self of the volume *Look, we have come through* (1917), of which 'Song of a Man who has come through' may serve as an example:

Not I, not I, but the wind that blows through me!

A fine wind is blowing the new direction of Time.

If only I let it bear me, carry me, if only it carry me!

If only I am sensitive, subtle, oh, delicate, a winged gift!

If only, most lovely of all, I yield myself and am borrowed

*By the fine, fine wind that takes its course through the chaos of the
world*

Like a fine, an exquisite chisel, a wedge-blade inserted;

If only I am keen and hard like the sheer tip of a wedge

Driven by invisible blows,

*The rock will split, we shall come at the wonder, we shall find the
Hesperides.*

Oh, for the wonder that bubbles into my soul,

I would be a good fountain, a good well-head,

Would blur no whisper, spoil no expression . . .

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But at this point I must stop to point out that Lawrence in this and in most of his poems is merely expressing (eloquently enough) a wish for a wonder to happen, a wonder that is never intrinsically present in the verse itself, as it is present in Hopkins's verse, or, looking forward, in the verse of Pound and Eliot. I do not wish to be confused with those who despise or attack Lawrence; or the contrary, for reasons which have nothing to do with the subject under discussion, which is the form of poetry, I regard him as, all things considered, the most original English writer of the post-war period. He has enlarged or intensified our very consciousness of the world in which we are vitally involved. But 'direct utterance from the instant, whole man' is prose, a prose that faithfully projects the man himself; and in so far as he projected himself, exposed his sensibilities and formulated his ideas, Lawrence made a unique contribution to our literature. But it was, in the technical sense, a prose contribution. Of the technique of free verse, as it was developing under his eyes, he had, as Pound realized from the beginning, no grain of understanding.

CHAPTER VI

The Isolation of the Image: T. E. Hulme

[i]

The ‘free verse’ movement, which is the contemporary phase of that cult of sincerity initiated by Coleridge, has been world-wide in its development, but it had its origins in France during the 1880’s. It penetrated to England (if we ignore some abortive experiments by Stephen Phillips) about 1907. Its wider diffusion in the English-speaking world has been due to its adoption by the two most significant poets of our time, Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot, but they were not, in any precise technical sense, the originators of the movement, even in England.

In *Le Livre des Masques* (first edition, Paris, 1896) Remy de Gourmont gives the credit of invention to three poets: Rimbaud, Laforgue and Gustave Kahn. ‘To whom do we owe *vers libre*?’, he asks. ‘To Rimbaud, whose *Illuminations* appeared in the review *Vogue* in 1886, to Laforgue who at the same period, in the same precious little review—edited by Gustave Kahn—published his *Légende* and *Solo de Lune*, and, finally, to M. Kahn himself, ever since he wrote:

*Voici l’allégresse des âmes d’automne,
La ville s’évapore en illusions proches,
Voici se voiler de violet et d’orangé les porches
De la nuit sans lune.
Princesse, qu’as-tu fait de la tiare orfèvrée?*

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—and above all to Walt Whitman, whose majestic licence we were then beginning to appreciate.¹

Kahn is probably the most significant name here, for though Rimbaud and Laforgue wrote free verse, they did not consciously propagate its principles. But Kahn did. His *Premiers poèmes*, published in 1897, is preceded by ‘une étude sur le vers libre’, based on the experiments of the preceding decade. From Kahn the theory of free verse passed to England through the most alert mind of the succeeding decade—that of T. E. Hulme. In a lecture on modern poetry Hulme mentioned Kahn in the following context:

‘The check to the Parnassian school marked the death of a particular form of French poetry which coincided with the birth and marvellous fertility of a new form. With the definite arrival of this new form of verse in 1880 came the appearance of a band of poets perhaps unequalled at any one time in the history of French poetry.

‘The new technique was first definitely stated by Kahn. It consisted of a denial of a regular number of syllables as the basis of versification. The length of the line is long and short, oscillating with the images used by the poet; it follows the contours of his thoughts and is free rather than regular; to use a rough analogy, it is clothes made to order, rather than ready-made clothes. This is a very bald statement of it, and I am not concerned here so much with French poetry as with English. The kind of verse I advocate is not the same as *vers libre*; I merely use the French as an example of the extraordinary effect that an emancipation of verse can have on poetic activity.’²

¹ *Op. cit.*, I, 245.

² Printed as Appendix II to Michael Roberts’s *T. E. Hulme*, London (Faber and Faber), 1938. Hulme also says: ‘I have not a catholic taste, but a violently personal and prejudiced one. I have no reverence for tradition. I came to the subject of verse from the inside rather than the outside. There were certain im-

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We do not know the exact date of Hulme's lecture, but it was delivered at the Poets Club, of which he was the leading spirit, probably in 1908. Hulme had left the Club by the beginning of 1909 because he found it too 'stuffy', and by March, 1909, had started a new and more experimental group. Earlier than this, in 1906, Hulme had been to Canada, working as lumberman and farm-labourer, and already at that time he was searching for 'images'.¹ He returned to England and early in 1907 went to Brussels, where he spent seven months teaching English and learning French and German. It was during this period that he came into direct contact with modern French poetry and philosophy. On his return to London he began to make a systematic study of aesthetics, philosophy and the history of art. To this period belong his *Notes on Language and Style*,² notes in which we find the first outlines of the principles of imagist poetry. We do not know exactly when Hulme first wrote an imagist poem, but two of them were published in an obscure booklet towards the end of 1908.³

pressions which I wanted to fix. I read verse to find models, but I could not find any that seemed exactly suitable to express that kind of impression, except perhaps a few jerky rhythms of Henley, until I came to read French *vers libre* which seemed to exactly fit the case.' (*Loc. cit.*, 259).

¹ In a letter from Canada he wrote: 'I have got lots of ideas and experience and am very glad I came, even if it were only for a suitable image I thought of one day, working in the railway, for what I was talking to you about just before I left London.' (Written to Miss A. M. Pattison, and quoted by her in a letter to me of May 2, 1923.) Cf. further in the lecture: 'Speaking of personal matters, the first time I felt the necessity or inevitability of verse, was in the desire to reproduce the peculiar quality of feeling which is induced by the flat spaces and wide horizons of the virgin prairie of western Canada.' (Roberts, 266.)

² First edited by me and published in *The Criterion*, III, 485-97 (July, 1925); reprinted as one of the University of Washington Chapbooks, Seattle, 1929. A fuller version is given by Michael Roberts, *op. cit.*, Appendix III.

³ For Christmas MDCCCCVIII. New Poems by Selwyn Image, Lady Margaret Sackville, Henry Simpson, Marion Cran, F. W. Tancred, T. E. Hulme and Dermot Freyer. Women's Printing Society, Ltd., 31, 33, 35, Brick St., Piccadilly, W. 1.

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One of these is perhaps the best-known of Hulme's 'handful' of poems:¹

*A touch of cold in the Autumn night—
I walked abroad,
And saw the ruddy moon lean over a hedge
Like a red-faced farmer.
I did not stop to speak, but nodded,
And round about were the wistful stars
With white faces like town children.*

¹ 'The Complete Poetical Works of T. E. Hulme' consists of five poems, first collected by Ezra Pound and printed as an Appendix to *Ripostes* (London, S. Swift and Company, 1912). This appendix has the following 'Prefatory Note':

'In publishing his *Complete Poetic Works* at thirty,^a Mr Hulme has set an enviable example to many of his contemporaries who have had less to say.'

'They are reprinted here for good fellowship; for good custom, a custom out of Tuscany and of Provence; and thirdly, for convenience, seeing their smallness of bulk; and for good memory, seeing that they recall certain evenings and meetings of two years gone, dull enough at the time, but rather pleasant to look back upon.'

'As for the "School of Images", which may or may not have existed, its principles were not so interesting as those of the "inherent dynamists" or of *Les Unanimistes*, yet they were probably sounder than those of a certain French school which attempted to dispense with verbs altogether; or of the Impressionists who brought forth:

Pink pigs blossoming upon the hillside;
or of the Post-Impressionists who beseech their ladies to let down slate-blue hair over their raspberry-coloured flanks.

'Ardoise rimed richly—ah, richly and rarely rimed!—with *framboise*.

'As for the future, *Les Imagistes*, the descendants of the forgotten school of 1909, have that in their keeping.'

'I refrain from publishing my proposed *Historical Memoir* of their forerunners, because Mr Hulme has threatened to print the original propaganda.'

E.P.

^a Mr Pound has grossly exaggerated my age.—T. E. H. (Hulme was born in 1883.)'

Hulme's imagist poems are more extensive than is usually realized. Pound himself printed one more in *Catholic Anthology* (1915), 'Poem: Abbreviated from the Conversation of Mr T. E. H. Trenches: St. Eloi'. Michael Roberts printed three more in Appendix I of his book on Hulme. In *The New Age* for October 6, 1921, there are thirty-nine fragments, varying from single 'images' to poems as long or longer than those in the 'Complete Works'.

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This was the kind of poetry that was being written by Hulme when Ezra Pound arrived in London in this same year 1908. Pound's first volumes of verse belong to the same year: *A Lume Spento*, published in Venice in June, and *A Quinzaine for this Yule*, published in December. Priorities, in the light of later achievements, are not very important, but the credit for working out the principles of versification adopted by the Imagists should clearly be given to Hulme. Pound has written a good deal about the aesthetics of poetry, but all his essential ideas, as we shall see, are present in Hulme's *Notes on Language and Style*, in his *Speculations*, or in the 'Lecture on Modern Poetry'. When Pound arrived in London he was, admittedly, ignorant of the modern French poets. He learned of them from Hulme, and from Hulme's adjutant, F. S. Flint. But he had arrived in London in a very receptive state of mind, and by October of this same year 1908 he could already formulate the 'ultimate attainments of poesy' as:

1. To paint the thing as I see it.
2. Beauty.
3. Freedom from didacticism.
4. It is only good manners if you repeat a few other men to at least do it better or more briefly. Utter originality is of course out of the question.¹

Not yet a very coherent set of principles. The first of them—to paint the thing as it is seen—is taken over from Hulme, but is hardly consistent with what Pound then meant by 'beauty', nor with the imitation of other poets. And Pound had been very busy imitating and improving on other men. 'Und überhaupt ich stamm aus Browning. Pourquoi nier son père?', as he says in a polyglot letter to René Taupin (May, 1928. *Letters*, 294). His debt to Browning is enormous; quite obvious are the influences of Yeats, Swinburne, Arthur

¹ Letter to William Carlos Williams, 21 October. *Letters*, 39–40.

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Symons, Rossetti and Morris; and as Mr Eliot has said, ‘the shades of Dowson, Lionel Johnson and Fiona flit about’.¹ The French influence, Pound confesses, was ‘relativement tard’—Villon before the London contacts, afterwards Gautier, Mallarmé, Rimbaud, Corbière and Tailhade. From the beginning Pound was nothing if not eclectic—think of what has still to be added: the Provençal poets, Catullus, Anglo-Saxon poetry, Chinese poetry, Dante and Cavalcanti, and, after all, Homer! One is in need of strong principles of one’s own to find a personal path through such a thicket.

Though it is too limited, it is convenient to retain *imagism* as a term for these principles. I shall try to re-state this theory of poetics as first worked out by Hulme, and then I shall discuss the modifications introduced by Pound and Eliot.

[ii]

Hulme set out from the premise that the age demanded a new verse form—every age does. The tendency of the age had been towards the production of a general effect—towards impressionism. ‘In the arts’, he said, ‘we seek for the maximum of individual and personal expression, rather than for the

¹ Introduction to *Selected Poems*, ix. Cf. Pound’s Preface to the *Poetical Works of Lionel Johnson* (London, 1915; Preface dated 1914): ‘In America ten or twelve years ago one read Fiona MacLeod, and Dowson, and Symons. One was guided by Mr Mosher of Bangor [a bookseller]. I think I first heard of Johnson in an odd sort of post-graduate course conducted by Dr Weygandt. One was drunk with “Celticism”, and with Dowson’s “Cynara”, and with one or two poems of Symon’s “Wanderers” and “I am the torch she saith”:

*I am the flame of beauty
And I burn that all may see
Beauty.*

Johnson’s poems were almost the last to catch one’s attention. Their appeal is not so much to the fluffy, unsorted imagination of adolescence as to more hardened passion and intellect of early middle age. I cannot speak of more than that. They hold their own now, not perhaps as a whole, but because of certain passages, because of that effect of neatness and hardness.’

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attainment of any absolute beauty.' The old poetry sought absolute perfection and dealt essentially with large themes and with action. Hence the epic and ballad forms. 'But modern verse is the exact opposite of this—it no longer deals with heroic action, it has become definitely and finally introspective and deals with expression and communication of momentary phases in the poet's mind.'

'Regular metre to this impressionist poetry is cramping, jangling, meaningless, and out of place. Into the delicate pattern of images and colour it introduces the heavy, crude pattern of rhetorical verse. It destroys the effect just as a barrel organ does, when it intrudes into the subtle interwoven harmonies of the modern symphony. It is a delicate and difficult art, that of evoking an image, of fitting the rhythm to the idea, and one is tempted to fall back to the comforting and easy arms of the old, regular metre, which takes away all the trouble for us.'

Then follows a distinction that was central in Hulme's view:

'The direct language is poetry, it is direct because it deals in images. The indirect language is prose, because it uses images that have died and become figures of speech.

'The new verse resembles sculpture rather than music; it appeals to the eye rather than the ear. It has to mould images, a kind of spiritual clay, into definite shapes . . . It builds up a plastic image which it hands over to the reader, whereas the old art endeavoured to influence him physically by the hypnotic effect of rhythm.'

I will now add to this general introductory statement some detached aphorisms from *Notes on Language and Style* which will give a more complete idea of the aesthetics of poetry as worked out by Hulme:

'All emotion depends on real solid vision or sound. It is physical.

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‘But in *rhetoric* and *expositional* prose we get words divorced from any real vision.

‘The ideal of modern prose is to be all counters, i.e. to pass to conclusions without thinking.

‘(In visual poetry) each *word* must be an image *seen*, not a counter.

‘It is seeing the real clay, that men in an agony worked with, that gives pleasure. To read a book which is *real clay* moulded by fingers that had to mould something, or they would clutch the throat of their maddened author. *No* flowing on of words, but tightly clutched tense fingers leaving marks in the clay.

‘The fallacy that language is logical, or that meaning is. Phrases have meaning for no reason . . . The idea is just as real as a landscape and there is the same difficulty in getting it on to paper . . . growing conviction of the Solidity of Ideas, as opposed to language.’

Hulme is here seen moving towards a theory of symbolic logic. He had read Husserl and the phenomenologists; also Max Scheler, and through Scheler he had been led to Nicolas Cusanus.¹ He may have had some knowledge of Ernst Cassirer’s earlier work (*Die Philosophie der Symbolischen Formen* did not begin to appear until 1923) gained either at the Congress of Aesthetics in Berlin, 1911, or at the Philosophical Congress, Bologna, 1912, both of which Hulme attended. At Cambridge he came into direct contact with G. E. Moore. His relations with Bergson, in whose work he found an accu-

¹ Cf. Michael Roberts (*op. cit.*, 148–9): ‘It is easy to see how much Hulme derived from Cusanus, either directly or through Scheler. Hulme’s talk about reasoning in terms of images, his conception of the fancy (*phantasia*) as a faculty that compares and equates sense impressions, his conviction that a limit must be set to natural knowledge somewhere this side of the knowledge of God or the attainment of perfect thought, all these are to be found in Cusanus; and even the idea of the world as cinders, with the mind as a kind of sorting machine, is implied in *De Docte Ignorantia*.’

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rate account of the experiences involved in art, were also personal as well as intellectual. Hulme's sense of the fragmentary nature of experience owes something to all these philosophers. He sought a view of the world which while logically coherent, recognized that the only realities are *partitions* of experience, and his poetics are consistent with such a philosophy. That he was moving towards what is now known as a theory of symbolic transformation, is made clear by the following aphorisms:

'Thought is prior to language and consists in the simultaneous presentation to the mind of two different images. Language is only a more or less feeble way of doing this.'

(Incidentally, this statement anticipates Pound's 'ideogrammic method', which he supposedly owes to Fenollosa.¹ Hulme was fully aware of the significance of 'the two simultaneously presented images', and speaks of 'the fire struck between stones'. This idea would have entered into the theory of imagism even if Pound had not edited the papers of Ernest Fenollosa.)

'Thought is the joining together of new analogies, and so inspiration is a matter of an accidentally seen analogy or unlooked-for resemblance. It is therefore necessary to get as large as possible change in sense impressions . . . the more change of shapes and sights there is the more chance of inspiration. Thoughts won by walking.'

'Fertility of invention means: remembrance of accidental occurrences *noted* and arranged.'

To Hulme the poetic activity was in the nature of a physical or physiological act:

'Think of sitting at that window in Chelsea and seeing the chimneys and the lights in the dusk. And then imagine that by contemplation this will transfer itself bodily on to paper.'

¹ See below, pp. 123-4.

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'This is the direct opposite of literature, which is never an absorption and meditation. But a deliberate choosing and working up of analogies. The continued, close, compressed effort.

'The demand for clear logical expression is impossible, as it would confine us to the use of flat counter-images only.

'If you only admit that form of manipulating images as good, if you deny all the other grasps, hands, for the cards, all solid images, all patterns, then you can be clear, but not otherwise.'

These *Notes* must be read in full, for they have a cumulative effect. A long, but final, quotation comes from a section entitled 'A Poem':

'It was formerly my idea that a poem was made somewhat as follows: The poet, in common with many other people, occasionally experienced emotions which strangely moved him. In the case of the greengrocer this was satisfied by reading Tennyson and sending the lines he seemed to have experienced to his beloved. The poet, on the contrary, tried to find new images to express what he felt. These lines and vague collections of words he gradually built up into poems. But this I now see to be wrong; the very act of trying to find a form to fit the separate phrases into, itself leads to the creation of new images hitherto not felt by the poet. In a sense the poetry writes itself. This creation by happy chance is analogous to the accidental stroke of the brush which creates a new beauty not previously consciously thought by the artist.

'The form of the poem is shaped by the intention. Vague phrases containing ideas which at past moments have strongly moved us: as the purpose of the poem is narrative or emotional the phrases become altered. The choice of a form is as important as the individual pieces and scraps of emotion of which the poem is made up. In the actual making accidental

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phrases are hit upon. Just as a musician in striking notes on a piano comes across what he wants, the painter on the canvas, so the poet not only gets the phrases he wants, but even from the words gets a *new* image.

✓'Creative effort means *new* images . . . The accidental discovery of effect, not conscious intellectual endeavour for it.' ✓

'The form of the poem is shaped by the intention'—this sentence shows the continuity or community of thought in Hulme and Coleridge. The new element in Hulme's theory is his insistence on the imagistic element in poetry—'creative effort means *new* images'. Coleridge recognized that words become 'effete', but he had an overwhelming fear of 'the tyranny of the senses'. This is a crux in our argument, for modern poetry—the poetry of Pound and of Eliot—has recognized that the senses are the source of linguistic vitality; and it might even be suggested that Coleridge's frustration as a poet was due to his neglect of the image. Coleridge shared Hopkins's admiration for the '*haecceitas*' of Duns Scotus, but he was conscious of the organic nature of language, which he thought of as a self-subsistent growth, and he had a feeling that to think in images was an atomization of this integral process. One of his philosophical notes deals with this question:

'In disciplining the mind one of the first rules should be, to lose no opportunity of tracing words to their origins; one good consequence of which will be, that he will be able to use the *language* of sight without being enslaved by its affections. He will at least secure himself from the delusive notion, that what is not *imageable* is not likewise *conceivable*. To emancipate the mind from the despotism of the eye is the first step towards its emancipation from the influences and intrusions of the senses, sensations and passions generally. Thus most effectually is the power of abstraction to be called forth,

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strengthened and familiarized, and it is this power of abstraction that chiefly distinguishes the human understanding from that of the higher animals—and in the different degrees in which this power is developed, the superiority of man over man mainly consists. Hence we are to account for the preference which the divine Plato gives to expressions taken from the objects of the ear, as terms of Music and Harmony, and in part at least for the numerical symbols in which Pythagoras clothed his philosophy.¹

This may be read either as a Platonic (or Hegelian) distinction between Poetry and Philosophy; or as an explanation of why Coleridge ceased to be a poet. It ignores the modern distinction between discursive and non-discursive modes of expression; and before we could treat it as a valid criticism of the ‘atomic’ presentation of experience involved in imagist poetry, we should have to take into account the philosophical justification for symbolic presentation (in myth, ritual and art) as developed by Cassirer and Susanne Langer. There can be no reconciliation of the opposed modes of expression indicated by the terms ‘abstraction’ and ‘imagination’; and the only possibility of a philosophical or metaphysical *poetry* is a transformation of abstractions into concrete images. ‘All poetry is an affair of the body—that is, to be real it must affect body’—that is Hulme’s fundamental belief. In so far as philosophy loses its poetic basis, and becomes a logical system without sensational base, to that extent philosophy becomes a sophisticated game with counters. ‘Symbols are picked out and believed to be realities [by “symbols” Hulme means semantic “signs”]. People imagine that all the complicated structure of the world can be woven out of “good” and “beauty”. These words are merely counters representing vague groups of things, to be moved about on a board for the

¹ *Coleridge on Logic and Learning*. By Alice D. Snyder. Yale Univ. Press (1929), 126–7.

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convenience of the players.' Even in philosophy there must be a continual renewal of symbols.

This insistence on a physical or sensational basis for poetry does not mean that poetry is necessarily 'atomised'. Fire is struck between stones, bridges leap from image to image, and there is finally a structural coherence. Michael Roberts, criticising Hulme's theory of poetry, says: 'The infinite, kicked out of the front door, comes in at the back, and Hulme, without knowing it, writes poems that deal with important and universal subjects. We see this happening in a short poem called "Above the Dock"':

*Above the quiet dock in midnight,
Tangled in the tall mast's corded height,
Hangs the moon. What seemed so far away
Is but a child's balloon, forgotten after play.*

'This certainly satisfies some of Hulme's criteria (continues Roberts): it gives a definite picture and a neat analogy; it deals with simple and familiar things; but it is wrong to say that it does not drag in the infinite. In all Hulme's poems, the "infinite" things—beauty, sky, moon and sea—appear, but where a romantic poet would try to make familiar things seem important by comparing them with moon and sea, Hulme reverses the effect and makes the infinite things seem small and homely by comparing them with a red-faced farmer, or a child's balloon, or a boy going home past the churchyard. This is the opposite of the romantic method, and it is easy enough to parody, but when it is done well its effects are as notable as those of romanticism, and perhaps not as different from them as Hulme thought.'¹

This is well said, apart from the confusing use of the word romanticism (as though classicism did not use similes for its abstractions!), and apart from the imputation that Hulme did

¹ *Op. cit.*, 228–9.

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not know what he was about. Hulme was deliberately constructing a new *Weltanschauung*, and quite consciously using a new method; the section of *Speculations* called 'Cinders' is a sketch for it. He happened to believe, however, that 'philosophy is about people in clothes, not about the soul of man . . . Philosophical syntheses and ethical systems are only possible in armchair moments. They are seen to be meaningless as soon as we get into a bus with a dirty baby and a crowd.' Or as he put it in another vivid phrase: 'The world lives in order to develop the lines on its face.' To-day we call such a philosophy Existentialism (Sartrean version).

It may seem that I have devoted a disproportionate amount of time to one who, as a poet, has survived as an appendix to the modern movement, one who, even as a philosopher and critic, made a brief transit in our busy generation. But altogether apart from his personal influence, which was germinal at the critical moment, Hulme was the first to realize that the coherence of the poem, its scape and inscape, was not necessarily a logical coherence. The poem had been released, by that development we have traced from Coleridge to Hopkins, to become a 'universe' of its own.¹ Hulme made it clear that such universes are made, not of empty booming words, but of plastic images, words impressed like clay with the poet's invention. It is not merely a question of importing

¹ Cf. Elizabeth Sewell, *The Structure of Poetry*, 98–9: 'Each poem must be an independent self-sufficient and closed system, constructed in its own particular way, with its own premises, development, and conclusion, its own logic, in fact . . . This poem-universe will, like the universe of prose, have a potential double-connection with the universe of experience, but the nature of the connection will be different. A poem starts, as prose does, with the connection between words and experience implicit in the fact of reference; but since this is what makes language an open system, and the aim of the poet is to create a closed system, this connection must be attenuated in some way. This cannot be done at the level of the words themselves because the connection between sound-look and reference in the individual word or phrase cannot be shifted. It could only be done by distracting the mind's attention from that connection.'

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images into the stream of discourse, to make it more vivid. Poetry is rather a crystallization of the discourse into symbolic images. But even this statement might be held to imply that discourse, grammatical language, in some sense is there first, and that the poet is merely the agent of a transformation. What is there first, said Hulme, is the world in its concreteness, evident to the senses: the physical phenomena. The poet seizes these, finds their verbal equivalence, and the rest—beauty, significance, metaphysical reverberations—is there as an intrinsic grace. Thought begins with the simultaneous presentation to the mind of two distinct but related images. Poetry is what then *happens*. Prose is a post-mortem on the event.

That having been made clear, the way was open to a new creative phase in English poetry—the phase associated with the names of Ezra Pound and Thomas Stearns Eliot.

CHAPTER VII

Ideas in Action: Ezra Pound

[i]

The young man from Idaho who descended on London one day in 1908 ‘complete in velvet coat, flowing tie, pointed beard and a halo of fiery hair’,¹ has given his own account of those formative years and has tended to minimize the importance of Hulme’s influence.² He cannot, of course, evade the chronological priority of Hulme’s theory and practice of imagist poetry; but Hulme had been drawn more and more towards philosophy, which Pound dismissed as so much ‘crap’, and had stopped writing verse. Pound had therefore turned to more congenial companions, particularly to Ford Madox Hueffer (later to be known as Ford Madox Ford) and to W. B. Yeats. Ford was a stimulating personality; and his fifteen months’ editorship of *The English Review* made the years 1908–9 memorable. He had a great feeling for prose style, and talked endlessly of Flaubert and ‘le mot juste’. But his influence on the development of English poetry was negligible. He himself wrote a loose impressionistic verse which shows no appreciation of the technical problems of free verse; and, indeed, to be just to Ford, he never made any pretension of being a significant poet. In his view the novel was the proper literary medium of our age, capable of doing

¹ Richard Curle, *Caravansary and Conversation*. London (Cape), 1937. Quoted by Michael Roberts, *op. cit.*, 22.

² Cf. ‘This Hulme Business’, a short article contributed by Pound to *The Townsman* of January, 1938, and reprinted as Appendix I to *The Poetry of Ezra Pound*, by Hugh Kenner. London (Faber), 1951.

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anything that poetry might claim to do, and a good deal more. There is poetry in his own novels, but it is prose poetry: he never felt the need for any other literary form.

As for the influence of W. B. Yeats, that must have been considerable, but it was a two-way process. The intimacy of Pound and Yeats begins in 1913, and the effects on Yeats were shown in the volume of his verse, *Responsibilities*, published in 1914. There was no question of direct imitation—Yeats was too strong a personality and too fixed in his poetic vision to be overwhelmed by a youth twenty years his junior. The following passage in *Reveries* may have been written subsequently to Yeats's intimate discussions with Pound, but it refers to an earlier period, and shows Yeats already fully conscious of organic form in poetry, and finding how hard it is to be sincere. Pound may have made Yeats conscious of his earlier failure: he did not have to convert him to the cult:

‘Someone at the Young Ireland Society gave me a newspaper that I might read some article or letter. I began idly reading verses describing the shore of Ireland as seen by a returning, dying emigrant. My eyes filled with tears and yet I knew the verses were badly written—vague, abstract words such as one finds in a newspaper. I looked at the end and saw the name of some political exile who had died but a few days after his return to Ireland. They had moved me because they contained the actual thoughts of a man at a passionate moment of life, and when I met my father I was full of the discovery. We should write out our own thoughts in as nearly as possible the language we thought them in, as though in a letter to an intimate friend. We should not disguise them in any way; for our lives give them force as the lives of people in plays give force to their words. Personal utterance, which had almost ceased in English literature, could be as fine an

escape from rhetoric and abstraction as drama itself. My father was indignant, almost violent, and would hear of nothing but drama. "Personal utterance was only egotism." I knew it was not, but as yet did not know how to explain the difference. I tried from that on to write out my emotions exactly as they came to me in life, not changing them to make them more beautiful, and to rid my syntax of all inversions and my vocabulary of literary words, and that made it hard to write at all. It meant rejecting the words or the constructions that had been used over and over because they flow most easily into rhyme and measure. Then, too, how hard it was to be sincere, not to make the emotion more beautiful and more violent or the circumstance more romantic. "If I can be sincere and make my language natural, and without becoming discursive, like a novelist, and so indiscreet and prosaic", I said to myself, "I shall, if good luck or bad luck make my life interesting, be a great poet; for it will be no longer a matter of literature at all." Yet when I re-read those early poems which gave me so much trouble, I find little but romantic convention, unconscious drama. But it is so many years before one can believe enough in what one feels even to know what the feeling is.¹

The process described in these lines, the gradual conversion to the cult of sincerity, was no doubt a process that took place over a number of years, and the part that Pound played in it may have been late, and merely a confirmation of decisions already taken. One must also allow for earlier contacts between Yeats and Hulme. Whatever the give-and-take of these years, Yeats was henceforth to strive for an organic form in his poetry. There is a short poem at the end of *Responsibilities* which is a confession of his new faith;

¹ *Reveries over Childhood and Youth*. Dundrum (Cuala Press), 1915, 122-3.
(The Preface is dated 'Christmas Day, 1914'.)

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*I made my song a coat
Covered with embroideries
Out of old mythologies
From heel to throat;
But the fools caught it,
Wore it in the world's eyes
As though they'd wrought it,
Song, let them take it,
For there's more enterprise
In walking naked.*

The coat ‘covered with embroideries out of old mythologies’ is, of course, his earlier verse of the Celtic Revival, based on legendary material, which the public had taken up and made into party poetry, or propaganda. Henceforth he was resolved ‘to walk naked’—that is to say, to find a more personal, a more exact and more concentrated style. Yeats never wrote in a form that could be called ‘free’; but his images become more precise, his rhythms more subtly adapted to his thought, that thought more objective:

*What if I bade you leave
The cavern of the mind?
There's better exercise
In the sunlight and wind.*

*Seek those images
That constitute the wild,
The lion and the virgin,
The harlot and the child.*

*Find in the middle air
An eagle on the wing,
Recognize the five
That make the Muses sing.¹*

¹ *Last Poems, 1936–1939.*

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Pound did not feel that he had anything to learn from Yeats. 'My stay in Stone Cottage', he wrote to his mother before leaving to stay with Yeats at Coleman's Hatch (November, 1913, *Letters*, 63), 'will not be in the least profitable. I detest the country. Yeats will amuse me part of the time and bore me to death with psychical research in the rest. I regard the visit as a duty to posterity.' Pound's debt to Yeats belongs to an earlier period, before he came to England; by 1913 he had shed this influence—Yeats had become 'a sort of great dim figure with its associations set in the past'. (*Letters*, 58.)

Yeats had nothing to teach him and Hueffer was no poet: to whom else, then, did Pound turn in those years 1908–14, during which the Imagist movement took shape? The conversations in Frith Street, where Hulme had held his weekly receptions, included painters and sculptors such as Jacob Epstein, Gaudier-Brzeska and Wyndham Lewis; poets such as F. S. Flint, Richard Aldington and half-forgotten figures like Storer and Tancred. A dozen other names might be mentioned, but we cannot be certain of the exact date of their comings and goings, or of the significance of their contributions (Sturge Moore, for example, was there from time to time and was an indefatigable discusser of all questions of poetic technique). Flint was probably the most useful member of the group, for he acted as foreign scout, sifting all the French reviews for interesting new poets and presenting them in a series of 'chronicles' contributed to the English magazines. His survey of the whole field of contemporary French poetry, published in the August, 1911, number of *Poetry and Drama* (a review edited by Harold Monro, the founder and proprietor of the Poetry Bookshop), had an immediate impact on Ezra Pound. He decided that these poets must be studied, and 'in the spring or early summer of 1912', he, Richard Aldington and H. D. (Hilda Doolittle) had decided that they 'had as much right to a group name as a number of French

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“schools”, and so the Imagist School first took shape. The title was inevitable—the word had been in common use since Hulme had introduced it, and it had been repeated frequently in Flint’s French chronicles.¹

The three principles agreed on by this group have been recorded by Pound: he is quoting from the original manifesto drawn up in 1913:

- ‘1. Direct treatment of the “thing” whether subjective or objective.
2. To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation.
3. As regarding rhythm: to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in the sequence of a metronome.’

The first two principles come from Hulme, almost in his own words—cf. ‘Always seek the hard, definite, personal word’² and ‘All emotion depends on real solid vision or sound. It is physical’.³ Hulme had rejected the old metric system, and had objected to rhythm because ‘the effect of rhythm, like that of music, is to produce a kind of hypnotic state, during which suggestions of grief or ecstasy are easily and powerfully effective, just as when we are drunk all jokes are funny. This is for the art of chanting, but the procedure of the new visual art is just the contrary. It depends for its effect not on a kind of half sleep produced, but on arresting the attention, so much so that the succession of visual images should exhaust one.’

The formulation of these first two principles disguises the element that links the Imagists directly to Coleridge and Wordsworth. Pound himself gives an alternative formulation

¹ Pound’s own account is given in ‘A Stray Document’, *Make It New*, London (Faber), 1934, 335–41. For a more detailed account of the Imagist movement as a whole, see *Imagism: a Chapter in the History of Modern Poetry*, by Stanley K. Coffmann, Jr., University of Oklahoma Press (Norman), 1951.

² *Speculations*, 231.

³ ‘Notes on Language and Style’, Roberts, *op. cit.*, 273.

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in his Preface to Lionel Johnson's *Poetical Works* (London, 1915; Preface dated 1914):

'Now Lionel Johnson cannot be shown to be in accord with our present doctrines and ambitions. His language is a bookish dialect, or rather it is not a dialect, it is a curial speech, and our aim is natural speech, the language as spoken. We desire the words of poetry to follow the natural order. We would write nothing that we might not say actually in life—under emotion. Johnson's verse is full of inversions, but no one has written purer Imagisme than he has, in the line

Clear lie the fields, and fade into blue air.

It has a beauty like the Chinese.'

Under Hulme's influence the emphasis had been on the visual or concrete element in 'presentatior'; but the third principle, with its reference to 'the sequence of the musical phrase', implies 'the natural order' of speech, for the natural order is a musical order.

Pound had always been interested in music.¹ One of his closest friends in his London period was Edmund Dulac, a musical amateur of wide and curious erudition; and at the same time he was sitting at the feet of Arnold Dolmetsch, learning about the intimate accord that had existed between poetry and music in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This brings him into relation with Hopkins, and makes the final knot in the threads of the complex development of modern verse. Hopkins, too, was versed in the lutanists; both

¹ 'My first friend was a painter, male, now dead. 2nd a Pyanist, naturally 15 years plus agée que moi. That was in the States. I entered London more or less under her wing; I was even an impressario, I borrowed the Lyceo Benedetto Marcello in Venice for a press recitation, in the absence of Wolff-Ferrari, author of *Das Neues Leben* and other operas, etc. Je connus the London mondo musicale, at least the concert-hall, recital part of it . . . Remains one clavichord, Delmetsch's own handiwork—Dulac making Arabian lutes.' To Iris Barry, 29 August, 1916. *Letters*, 146-7.

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Pound and Hopkins attempted to write music. ‘To cut a shape in time’—that, Pound realized, was the task both of poetry and of music. ‘Sounds that stop the flow, and durations either of syllables, or implied between them, “forced onto the voice” of the reader by the nature of the “verse”. (E.g. my *Mauberley*).’¹

It was on this issue (though it may not have been specified) that Pound gradually separated himself from the new group. As a matter of fact, a new influence had come into his life. In 1913 he had been made literary executor to the orientalist, Ernest Fenollosa, and one of Fenollosa’s manuscripts, a treatise on *The Chinese Written Character*, was to be quite decisive in Pound’s intellectual and technical development.

This treatise,² as Pound says in an introductory note, is not ‘a bare philological discussion, but a study of the fundamentals of all aesthetics’. It may be classed with Worringer’s *Abstraktion und Einfühlung*, Focillon’s *La vie des formes*, Klee’s *Lecture on Modern Art* and Stravinsky’s *Poetics of Music* as one of the key documents of modern art. From it Pound took two notions which he applied to his verse: (1) the notion that poetry is a *time art*, and (2) the notion of *ideas in action*.

Chinese poetry, Fenollosa pointed out, has a unique advantage in that the written character is pictorial—it does not merely signify action: it can depict it. The characters which signify a statement like ‘man sees horse’ have legs; they are alive. A Chinese sentence therefore ‘has something of the quality of a continuous moving picture’.

One of Pound’s main endeavours has been to import this quality into English poetry. The method he adopted was the one already indicated by Hulme: the juxtaposition of clear images. Two verbal images, side by side, are more than two

¹ *Letters*, 339.

² *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*. With a Foreword and Notes by Ezra Pound. London (Stanley Nott), 1936.

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distinct perceptions: fire strikes between them, as Hulme said, and you get a third quality which does not belong to either image separately. The chord in music is a similar phenomenon.

Fenollosa proceeds to point out that ‘the great number of these (Chinese) ideographic roots carry in them a *verbal idea of action*’—they are shorthand pictures of actions or processes. ‘For example, the ideograph meaning “to speak” is a mouth with two words and a flame coming out of it . . . In this process of compounding, two things added together do not produce a third thing but suggest some fundamental relation between them.’

The basic sentence-structure in all languages is transitive. ‘All truth’, says Fenollosa, ‘has to be expressed in sentences because all truth is the *transference of power*. The type of sentence in nature is a flash of lightning. It passes between two terms, a cloud and the earth.’ And likewise, ‘the normal and typical sentence in English as well as in Chinese expresses just this unit of natural process. It consists of three necessary words: the first denoting the agent or subject from which the act starts, the second embodying the very stroke of the act, the third pointing to the object of the impact. Thus:

Farmer pounds rice

Fenollosa tells us how language gradually developed the weaker, intransitive forms, and how in Aryan languages the copula ‘is’ was introduced to make communication easier, if less precise, less forceful—‘the monkey is a mammal’ instead of ‘the monkey brings forth live young’.

To represent intangible qualities, the unseen, the Chinese use the metaphorical process: that is, ‘the use of material images to suggest immaterial relations’. ‘The whole delicate substance of speech is built upon substrata of metaphor. Abstract terms, pressed by etymology, reveal their ancient roots still embedded in direct action. But the primitive metaphors

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do not spring from arbitrary *subjective* processes. They are possible because they follow objective lines of relation in nature herself.'

There is no need to follow Fenollosa throughout his exposition, but his main insistence—and it has always been Pound's fanatical belief—is that it is a mistake to suppose that art and poetry aim to deal with the general and the abstract. 'Metaphor, the revealer of nature, is the very substance of poetry.'

The aim of the poet should be to get away from the tyranny of medieval logic—to return to original processes of unconscious language formation. The way back lies through the concrete image, the *thing*, and through the metaphor, two concrete images in juxtaposition. 'The moment we use the copula, the moment we express subjective inclusions, poetry evaporates. The more concretely and vividly we express the interactions of things the better the poetry. We need in poetry thousands of active words, each doing its utmost to show forth the motive and vital forces. We can not exhibit the wealth of nature by mere summation, by the piling of sentences. Poetic thought works by suggestion, crowding maximum meaning into the single phrase pregnant, charged, and luminous from within.'¹

These words of Fenollosa's were adopted by Pound as his poetics. Writing from Coleman's Hatch to Harriet Monroe in January, 1915, he gave an outline of his new credo. It is vivid enough and important enough to be quoted at length:

'Poetry must be *as well written as prose*. Its language must be a fine language, departing in no way from speech save by a heightened intensity (i.e. simplicity). There must be no book words, no periphrases, no inversions. It must be as simple as De Maupassant's best prose, and as hard as Stendhal's.

'There must be no interjections. No words flying off to

¹ *Op. cit.*, 32.

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nothing. Granted one can't get perfection every shot, this must be one's INTENTION.

'Rhythm MUST have meaning. It can't be merely a careless dash off, with no grip and no real hold to the words and sense, a tumty tum tumty tum tum ta.

'There must be no clichés, set phrases, stereotyped jargonese. The only escape from such is by precision, a result of concentrated attention to what one is writing. The test of a writer is his ability for such concentration AND for his power to stay concentrated till he gets to the end of his poem, whether it is two lines or two hundred.

'Objectivity and again objectivity, and expression: no hindsome-beforeness, no straddled adjectives (as "addled mosses dank"), no Tennysonianness of speech; nothing—nothing that you couldn't, in some circumstance, in the stress of some emotion, actually say. Every literaryism, every book word, fritters away a scrap of the reader's patience, a scrap of his sense of your sincerity. When one really feels and thinks, one stammers with simple speech; it is only in the flurry, the shallow frothy excitement of writing, or the inebriety of a metre, that one falls into the easy—oh, how easy!—speech of books and poems that one has read.

'Language is made out of concrete things. General expressions in non-concrete terms are a laziness; they are talk, not art, not creation. They are the reaction of things on the writer, not a creative act *by* the writer.

"Epithets" are usually abstractions—I mean what they call "epithets" in the books about poetry. The only adjective that is worth using is the adjective that is essential to the sense of the passage, not the decorative frill adjective.'¹

Pound was then twenty-nine, and he was never to add anything of value to this formulation of the basic principles of

¹ *Letters*, 91.

modern poetry. The question to be discussed is to what extent he has been faithful to these principles.

What Pound wrote before 1908 does not concern us. What he wrote between 1908 and 1915, the period of his intensest development, will naturally show the fluctuating nature of any organic growth. It was not an easy novitiate for Pound: his mind was so impregnated by the poeticisms of the past that he had to struggle long and desperately to find his own voice. But that is what makes his early verse such an incomparable school of poetry. Mr Eliot, in his Introduction to the *Selected Poems*, has traced this development with acuteness—the acuteness of the athlete who has to run the same course. Mr Eliot's 'selection' from these early poems is the most effective form of criticism, for what has been discarded (if that too were collected) would suggest, not so much the poetic junk-shop as miscellaneous properties from a Verdi opera. It may be 'easier', as Mr Eliot says, 'to trace the influence of the exact and difficult Provençal versification, than to distinguish the element of genuine revivification of Provençal, from the element of romantic fantasy which Pound acquired, not from Arnaut Daniel or Dante, but from the 'Nineties'. My point is that it was no more necessary to Pound to go to Provençal poetry for his versification than it was for Keats to go to Milton. Pound's emancipation from foreign idioms seems to have been just as difficult (and as necessary) as was Keats's, and from this point of view it was his study of Anglo-Saxon poetry, which produced his translation of 'The Seafarer' (1912), combined with his study of the basic principles laid down by Fenollosa (1913-4), that effected the purification of style necessary for *Mauberley* and the *Cantos*. It should be noted, for whatever bearing it has on his mature work, that Pound has never made a clean break with his Parnassian past. As late as 1949, in the New Directions issue of *Personae*, the early poems salvaged for futurity have increased in number.

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Such bombastic pastiches as ‘Villonaud for this Yule’ and ‘A Villonaud: Ballad for the Gibbet’ have never been renounced, and even Mr Eliot can include in his *Selections* a poem, ‘Praise of Ysolt’, with lines like:

*Lo I am worn with travail
And the wandering of many roads hath made my eyes
As dark red circles filled with dust.
Yet there is a trembling upon me in the twilight,
And little red elf words crying ‘A song’,
Little grey elf words crying for a song,
Little brown leaf words crying ‘A song’.
The words are as leaves, old brown leaves in the spring time
Blowing they know not whither, seeking a song.*

This sentimental strain is still present in *Lustra*:

*Dawn enters with little feet
like a gilded Pavlova.*

The principles he had already enunciated by this time should have condemned words like ‘little’, and the use of ‘like’ in poetry is better avoided. The word ‘soul’ cannot now serve any poetic purpose:

*She is beautiful as the sunlight, and as fluid.
She has no name, and no place.
How have I laboured to bring her soul into separation;
To give her a name and her being!*

In *Lustra* the verse is still full of invocations (‘O generation of the thoroughly smug’, ‘O bewildered heart’, ‘O world, I am sorry for you’, ‘O woman of my dreams’, ‘O my songs’, ‘O mountains of Hellas!’) Archaicisms and inversions abound, and there is still a good deal of Browningesque swagger—even in an otherwise good poem like ‘Near Perigord’. But the new qualities predominate: the precise image:

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*The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black bough...*

(no ‘like’ here). There is a Laforguean irony, as in ‘Les Millwin’ and ‘the Bellaires’, poems that point forward to *Mauberley*; and, most significant, a new musical phrasing:

*An image of Lethe,
and the fields
Full offaint light
but golden,
Gray cliffs,
and beneath them
A sea
Harsher than granite,
unstill, never ceasing;
High forms
with the movement of gods,
Perilous aspect;
And one said:
‘This is Actaeon.’
Actaeon of the golden greaves!

Over fair meadows,
Over the cool face of that field,
Unstill, ever moving,
Hosts of an ancient people,
The silent cortège.*

One might criticize this poem for a certain lack of concreteness (‘High forms / with the movement of gods’ does not convey a very concrete image), but the phrasing, subtly indicated by the line divisions, is wonderfully sensitive; and the coda, ending on the deep foreign note of the word ‘cortège’, is perfect. It is in the *Cathay* poems (1915) that these two

qualities of concreteness and musical phrasing are most consistently manifested.

Mauberley, which Mr Eliot believes to be ‘much the finest poem before the *Cantos*’, was published in 1920. Mr Eliot praises it for its accomplished and varied versification:

‘I only pretend to know as much about versifying as my carpenter knows about woodwork, or my painter about temper. But I know very well that the apparent roughness and naiveté of the verse and rhyming of *Mauberley* are inevitably the result of many years of hard work . . . the poem seems to me, when you have marked the sophistication and the great variety of the verse, verse of a man who knows his way about, to be a positive document of sensibility . . . it is, in the best sense of Arnold’s worn phrase, a “criticism of life”.’

All this I accept, but I am keeping my eye on those poetic principles enunciated with such conviction in 1915, and I find that defections are creeping in, defections which were to grow with the years and become a frequent flaw on the surface of the *Cantos*. It is not only the verse that is sophisticated: the standpoint from which life is criticized is also sophisticated. Personally I have never seen much justification for embedding tags from foreign languages in English verse: it baffles the reader who cannot understand Greek, Italian or Chinese (and why should a reader of English verse be expected to understand these languages?); it introduces an uncertain music (for who is to know how the poet, or anyone else, pronounces his Greek or Latin?); and it is fundamentally objectionable because it proceeds from feelings of intellectual superiority, whereas all great poetry, as Keats realized, is born of a certain modesty and simplicity of heart. But this is only one aspect of the sophistication of *Mauberley*: more objectionable is a certain ‘knowingness’ that pervades the whole poem –the assumption that he alone, ‘E.P.’, possessed an ‘Attic

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grace' in our time; and, profoundest failing of all, his deep-seated resentment. The 'non-esteem of self-styled "his betters"' may have led 'to his final / Exclusion from the world of letters'. But other poets (again one thinks of Keats, but also of Hopkins) have experienced this same lack of esteem, but have not allowed it to poison their hearts and their verses.

There is precise imagery in this poem, or series of poems, but there is also a lot of turgid latinity which hardly consorts with what Fenollosa meant by 'the metaphorical overtones of neighbouring words'—I mean, that I do not find any overtones at all in lines like:

*Incapable of the least utterance of composition,
Emendation, conservation of the 'better tradition',
Refinement of medium, elimination of superfluities,
August attraction or concentration.*

Admittedly *Mauberley* is a satirical poem (and these lines may be satirical). But satire, too, gains from a concreteness of imagery, as Swift showed in his verse. Though there is concreteness in some of the verses of *Mauberley*, and even lyrical beauty—

The coral isle, the lion-coloured sand—

yet in general such a poem is more closely related to the rhetoric of Pope than to the poetry of Donne or Rihaku.

[ii]

It is not part of my intention to devote any considerable time to the *Cantos* as a separate achievement of Pound's: they have been very adequately dealt with in books by two American critics.¹ This 'work in progress', which will run to a

¹ *The Poetry of Ezra Pound*, by Hugh Kenner. London (Faber), 1951; New York (New Directions), 1951; *Ezra Pound and the Cantos* by Harold H. Watts. London (Routledge and Kegan Paul), 1952; Chicago (Regnery), 1952.

hundred cantos, is not yet complete; but the eighty-odd cantos that have been published are sufficient for any critical purpose, and if there is an over-all design, it should by now be obvious. I doubt if any claims of a strictly formal nature can be convincingly pressed. The first Malatesta Cantos were published in *The Criterion* as long ago as 1923, and in thirty years there have been considerable variations of style and internal structure. The poem is built up by 'devices', as Professor Watts calls them—methods of presentation which hold the poem together, give it textual coherence. Watts distinguishes two 'habits of composition' or techniques—imagism and the dramatic monologue; and we have seen to what predecessors Pound owes these devices. What is novel in Pound's practice is his development of imagism from the presentation of the static image—the inert natural phenomenon—to the presentation of the non-static, dynamic image—the image of action, more particularly of what Pound calls 'ideas in action'. Professor Watts points out that there are no Platonic overtones in this poetic process—'no suggestion that "ideas" "realise" themselves in human action. Ideas, for Pound, exist only in separate human actions and are not to be detached from them'. The poetry therefore, remains concrete.

What Pound next proceeds to do—and it is the basic technique of the *Cantos*—is to present such dynamic images in apposition, parallel to one another (sometimes actually parallel in typographical setting, but more often parallel in the sense that a canto, or a section of a canto, is constructed in related pairs of images).¹ The reader is expected to make the contact,

¹ Hopkins, as already noted (see p. 84) had pointed out that 'the artificial part of poetry . . . reduces itself to the principle of parallelism . . . But parallelism is of two kinds necessarily—where the opposition is clearly marked, and where it is transitional rather or chromatic. Only the first kind, that of marked parallelism, is concerned with the structure of verse—in rhythm, the recurrence of a certain sequence of syllables, in metre, the recurrence of a certain sequence of rhythm, in alliteration, in assonance and in rhyme. Now the force of this

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and to experience a specifically poetic shock as the two images come into mental opposition. Watts has an excellent description of the process:

'Recall that the Chinese poet coerces, within the limits of a brief poem, an all-over reaction by a selection and association of concrete objects, the Chinese word-symbols. Why may an English-writing poet not perform an act of coercion also: analogous but not the same, on a greater scale, in a language whose tyrannies will remain quite unlike the beneficent ones of the Chinese? By a selection and association of concrete objects (chiefly persons or "ideas in action") all without direct comment, the poet should be able to force the reader to perform a task much more complex, it is true, than that which the reader of Rihaku performs—more complex but in a way the same: the over-arching meaning will be the reader's creation, not (in an explicit sense, at least) the poet's.¹

The whole validity of Pound's great experiment will depend on the successful assimilation, by an adequate audience, of this imported device. Juxtaposed images of the visual, static kind have become a normal device of English poetry: 'So much depends', as William Carlos Williams has said,¹

*upon
a red wheel
barrow*

recurrence is to beget a recurrence of parallelism answering to it in the words of thought and, speaking roughly and rather for the tendency than the invariable result, the more marked parallelism in structure whether of elaboration or of emphasis begets more marked parallelism in the words and sense. And moreover parallelism in expression tends to beget or passes into parallelism in thought.' (*Notebooks*, p. 92-3.) The process is just the reverse in Pound—parallelism in thought or idea tends to beget a parallelism in the structure of the poem.

¹ *Op. cit.*, 59.

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*glazed with rain
water*

*beside the white
chickens*

a reverberation of intensely coloured images, quite in the Chinese manner. But Pound's English device is only related to this Chinese device by analogy, for what stand side by side are not precise coloured objects, but anything from a lynx or three small boys on three bicycles to a précis of the history of a Chinese Dynasty. The demand on the reader's mental agility is therefore at times exorbitant. Mr Kenner says: 'There is always the danger of demanding from poetry the wrong kind of coherence.' It is not a danger we are likely to encounter in the present context.

A 'language of exploration' is taken for granted by the exponent of modern poetry, but Mr Kenner demands, on behalf of Pound, a 'music whose silences are filled with the elaborative spinning of invisible filaments'.¹ It may be doubted whether the general reader and I imply a reader with a sensibility accessible to the overtones of poetry—is equipped with a sufficiently subtle receiving-set. Not only must he listen for silences: he must look for the invisible, and perform both operations simultaneously. I prefer Professor Watts's analogy of the mosaic. 'If, at Ravenna, one stands too near a wall, one sees the special squares of colour, unblended, individual, unrelated to the rest of the composition. If, however, one moves away, there emerges—by the fact of visual combination—the distinguished, hieratic excellence of the temple adornments. Let us not insist that the comparison between the labours of the artist in mosaic and those of Pound in words is close. It is not. It would be closer if one were to imagine what would survive the partial bombing of San Vitale. Pound's material—

¹ *Op. cit.*, 202.

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the stuff of human experience—*has* been bombed (he would say) for several centuries by the working of usury, more specifically, of capitalist democracy. From these ruins—the breaking up of significant, rich experience—only the dishonest patch together a picture or a poem that is easy to grasp.¹.

The *Cantos* are incoherent: I think it would not only be more honest to admit the fact (and to point to obvious explanations of the fact not only in the circumstances of our time, but also in Pound's own psychological disposition), but would also serve to enhance the real virtues of the poem. Suppose, for example, for a problematic coherence we substitute, as the outstanding quality of the poem, its inexhaustible flexibility of diction. What other poem in our language, or in any language, could pass without stress or disaster from the lyric perfection of:

The sea runs in the beach-groove, shaking the floated pebbles:

Eleanor!

The scarlet curtain throws a less scarlet shadow;

Lamplight at Buovilla, e quel remir,

And all that day

Nicea moved before me

And the cold grey air troubled her not

For all her naked beauty, bit not the tropic skin,

And the long slender feet lit on the curb's marge

And her moving height went before me,

We alone having being.

And all that day, another day:

Thin husks I had known as men,

Dry casques of departed locusts

speaking a shell of speech . . .

¹ Op. cit., 65-6.

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Propped between chairs and table . . .

Words like the locust-shells, moved by no inner being:

A dryness calling for death . . .

to the narrative ease of:

*And there was that music publisher,
The fellow that brought back the shrunk Indian head
Boned, oiled, from Bolivia . . .*

and then to the denunciatory violence of:

*The slough of unamiable liars,
bog of stupidities,
malevolent stupidities, and stupidities,
the soil living pus, full of vermin,
dead maggots begetting live maggots,
slum owners,
usurers squeezing crab-lice, panders to authority,
pets-de-loup, sitting on piles of stone books,
. obscuring the texts with philology . . .*

or the didacticism of:

*with usura, sin against nature,
is thy bread evermore of stale rags
is thy bread dry as paper,
with no mountain wheat, no strong flour
with usura the line grows thick . . .
with usura is no clear demarcation
and no man can find site for his dwelling.
Stone cutter is kept from his stone
weaver is kept from his loom . . .*

As a style it can absorb dates and statistics, slang and dialect, Latin and Greek, and even Chinese ideograms. If this sounds like the digestive system of a boa-constrictor, it must nevertheless be admitted that the animal has grace. But it must also

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be admitted that there are times when the shape of some victim too hastily swallowed shows through the skin. We get rather tired of Thomas Jefferson and John Adams; and Chinese history, condensed into cantos, seems too arbitrary. But the poetry is always lying in wait for us; more than that —the poetry is always implicit, if only by contrast. Pound has said (in his 'Notes on Elizabethan Classics') that 'beauty is a brief gasp between one cliché and another'. There is more than one kind of cliché, of course, but it has been Pound's steady intention to avoid the 'Miltonian' cliché, 'the stock and stilted phraseology of the usual English verse as it has come down to us.' Go in fear of abstractions; present the image. If the poetry is not in the perception, don't work up that perception into a substitute rhetoric. 'Consider the definiteness of Dante's presentation as compared with Milton's rhetoric'. Pound does not always observe his own precepts, but his ideal of poetry is clear, precise, exacting in its demand for discipline and sacrifice.

The *Cantos* constitute, in the poet's own intention, a poem 'in action', a poem with a purpose, and that purpose is nothing less than the renewal of a decadent civilization. I have been concerned in these pages exclusively with the renewal of poetic diction—a renewal which, in my philosophy as in Pound's, cannot be separated from the social process. Confining ourselves to the selected approach, that of technique, we can have no hesitation in subscribing to Mr Eliot's judgment: *il miglior fabbro*. When all his debts have been acknowledged and the lines of influence traced back, the converging forces of Pound's advance must subdue the reader. 'More style than form', was Yeats's considered judgment —'at moments more style, more deliberate nobility and the means to convey it than any contemporary poet known to me, but it is constantly interrupted, broken, twisted into nothing by its direct opposite, nervous obsession, nightmare, stammering

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confusion . . .¹ This will probably stand as a final judgment on Pound, but it allows for the possibility that few English poets have written so many fragments of perfect verse.

¹ Introduction to the *Oxford Book of Modern Verse* (1936), xxv.

CHAPTER VIII

A Point of Intensity: T. S. Eliot

If I now turn to the work of T. S. Eliot, it is merely to adorn the tale. Again I shall confine myself to technique, to poetic diction. Eliot, as he has freely admitted, owes much to the example and practical criticism of his brother-poet. And yet there is a distinction to be made, the general sense of which has been indicated by Eliot himself in his Introduction to the *Selected Poems* of Ezra Pound. ‘My own verse’, he wrote, ‘is, as far as I can judge, nearer to the original meaning of *vers libre* than is any of the other types [the other types being “that of Pound, and that of the disciples of Whitman”]: at least, the form in which I began to write, in 1908 or 1909, was directly drawn from the study of Laforgue together with the later Elizabethan drama; and I do not know anyone who started from exactly that point.’

We will examine this confession presently, but there is first another, more general, text to cite. It comes from a lecture given by Mr Eliot in Glasgow in 1942 on ‘The Music of Poetry’:

‘As for “free verse”, I expressed my view twenty-five years ago by saying that no verse is free for the man who wants to do a good job. No one has better cause to know than I, that a great deal of bad prose has been written under the name of free verse: though whether its authors wrote bad prose or bad verse, or bad verse in one style or another, seems to me a matter of indifference. But only a bad poet could welcome free verse as a liberation from form. It was a revolt against

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dead form, and a preparation for new form or for the renewal of the old; it was an insistence upon the inner unity which is unique to every poem, against the outer unity which is typical. The poem comes before the form, in the sense that a form grows out of the attempt of somebody to say something; just as a system of prosody is only a formulation of the identities in the rhythms of a succession of poets influenced by each other.¹

I need not point to the similarity—indeed, the unconscious identity—of the latter part of this passage with Coleridge's original formulation of the principle of organic poetry (see pages 19, 176). But *in principle* there is no distinction to be made between Eliot and Coleridge, or between Eliot and Pound. It is only in the application of the principle that Eliot shows his originality and his separate development.

In this lecture, and in the later Theodore Spencer lecture at Harvard,² Mr Eliot pays much attention to the relation between poetic diction and colloquial speech; and his own development has a parallel in the one he traces in Shakespeare. That is to say, there are two periods or phases:

'During the first, he (Shakespeare) was slowly adapting his form to colloquial speech: so that by the time he wrote *Anthony and Cleopatra* he had devised a medium in which everything that any dramatic character might have to say, whether high or low, "poetical" or "prosaic", could be said with naturalness and beauty. Having got to this point, he began to elaborate. The first period . . . is from artificiality to simplicity, from stiffness to suppleness. The later plays move from simplicity towards elaboration. He is occupied with the other task of the poet—doing the work of two poets in one lifetime—that of experimenting to see how elaborate, how

¹ *The Music of Poetry*. Glasgow (Jackson, Son and Company), 1942.

² *Poetry and Drama*. London (Faber), 1951.

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complicated, the music could be made without his characters ceasing to be human beings. That is the poet of *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, *Pericles* and *The Tempest*.'

Substitute for *Anthony and Cleopatra*, *The Waste Land*; and for *Cymbeline* etc., *Family Reunion*, *The Cocktail Party* and plays yet unwritten, and we have a fairly exact description of Mr Eliot's own development.

Of the earlier phase sufficient has already been said by other critics: I would only add that they seem to me to have emphasized the Laforguean influence a little too much to the exclusion of the Elizabethan influence. Laforgue suggests the ironic attitude, and perhaps the free verse *structure*: the poetic *tone* comes from the earlier poets; and even in the matter of irony a poet like Thomas Middleton is not irrelevant. But the poet who, in this technical discussion, is wholly relevant is, as Mr Eliot himself has made clear, Shakespeare. Both poets are essentially dramatic poets—and that suggests the main distinction between Eliot and Pound, for Pound is essentially a lyric poet. I doubt if any of Eliot's poems are, strictly speaking, lyrical—that is, written to music, real or imaginary. 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' is not a 'song', but a dramatic monologue. So is the 'Portrait of a Lady'; and the various 'Preludes' and 'Rhapsodies' are ironically so named. Poems like 'A Cooking Egg' or 'Sweeney among the Nightingales' are emotionally precise, verbally stream-lined, but visual rather than vocal. The major poems, from *The Waste Land* onwards, are specifically dramatic, and merge, by way of 'Sweeney Agonistes' and the *Four Quartets*, into the poetic dramas proper: *Murder in the Cathedral*, *The Family Reunion*, and *The Cocktail Party*. This does not mean that Eliot is not, in the meaning originally given to the word by Hulme, an imagist. On the contrary, it might be argued that imagism, with its visual precision, its presentation of the physical sensa-

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tion, its directness, is more appropriate to dramatic *speech* than to lyrical *song*. I would be prepared to argue that there is more true *imagism* in Eliot's verse than in Pound's: there is, after all, less *rhetoric*!

Eliot's aim has been simply, openly, movingly described in the Theodore Spencer lecture. It has been a long search for sincerity of utterance—sincerity of *poetic* utterance: a long disciplined effort to avoid the artificiality of *rhetoric*. He begins the lecture by making a triple distinction between 'prose, and verse, and an ordinary speech which is mostly below the level of either verse or prose'. Prose, he points out, can be as artificial on the stage as verse; or alternatively, verse can be as natural as prose. He then states what has been his aim: 'a form of verse in which everything can be said which has to be said.' This involves retaining the distinction between verse and poetry, for 'if our verse is to have so wide a range that it can say anything that has to be said, it follows that it will not be "poetry" all the time. It will only be "poetry" when the dramatic situation has reached such a point of intensity that poetry becomes the natural utterance, because then it is the only language in which the emotions can be expressed at all.'

I shall return to this distinction between verse and poetry presently, but first let us see what 'verse', in Mr Eliot's sense of the term, involves. He first gives a reason for writing in verse rather than in prose: it is that verse rhythm can have an *unconscious* effect upon the audience; and he very convincingly demonstrates this point in an analysis of the opening scene of *Hamlet*. He shows that verse intensifies the drama: that its design is hidden, and imperceptible to the audience; and that it can, if necessary for a particular purpose, be momentarily lifted to the *consciously* poetic level. But for most of the time Shakespeare is employing 'a really dramatic verse . . . to say the most matter-of-fact things'.

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Eliot then relates his own experience—his own attempt progressively to achieve the same technical mastery of the dramatic medium. We must ignore his interesting remarks on dramatic structure to concentrate on the problem of versification. Eliot from the beginning was convinced that it was essential to avoid any echo of Shakespeare—‘the rhythm of regular blank verse had become too remote from the movement of modern speech’. For *Murder in the Cathedral* what he kept in mind was the versification of *Everyman*, by which he seems to imply ‘an avoidance of too much iambic, some use of alliteration, and occasional unexpected rhyme’—features which, one might think he could have found in late Shakespeare.

The Family Reunion was a more deliberate attempt to solve the problem of a contemporary verse form for drama—that is to say, ‘to find a rhythm close to contemporary speech, in which the stresses could be made to come wherever we should naturally put them, in uttering the particular phrase on the particular occasion. What I worked out is substantially what I have continued to employ: a line of varying length and varying number of syllables, with a caesura and three stresses. The caesura and the stresses may come at different places, *almost anywhere in the line*: the stresses may be close together or well separated by light syllables; the only rule being that there must be one stress on one side of the caesura and two on the other.’

In *The Cocktail Party* the development is mainly in dramatic structure: as for the versification, ‘I laid down for myself the ascetic rule to avoid poetry which could not stand the test of strict dramatic utility: with such success, indeed, that it is perhaps an open question whether there is any poetry in the play at all.’ But Mr Eliot also confesses that ‘while the self-education of a poet trying to write for the theatre seems to require a long period of disciplining his poetry, and putting it, so to speak, on a very thin diet in order to adapt it to the needs of

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the stage, there may be a later stage, when (and if) the understanding of theatrical technique has become nature, at which he can dare to make more liberal use of poetry and take greater liberties with ordinary colloquial speech. I base that belief on the evolution of Shakespeare, and on some study of the language in his late plays'.

Let us note, in the first place, that the system of versification that Eliot has worked out differs in no important respect from the 'sprung rhythm' of Hopkins. If there is a difference, it lies in the use of the caesura. The caesura is merely, as Hopkins points out, one of the devices used in verse to avoid monotony of rhythm: it is the breaking of the rhythm into sense words of different length from the sound words:

*And I said, 'My cousin Amy, / speak, and speak the truth to me,
Trust me, cousin, all the current / of my being sets to thee.'*

'The more marked the rhythm', Hopkins observes,¹ 'whether by quantity or beat the more need of a caesura to break it'—as in the example I have quoted from Tennyson. But the rhythm of *The Cocktail Party* is anything but marked: the poet has done his best to avoid a marked rhythm. He also states that the caesura can come 'almost anywhere in the line', and the general effect of this lack of rule and lack of effective rhythm is to make the caesura almost inaudible, or an arbitrary choice. Where, in the following lines, does the caesura come—as I have marked it with one stroke, or as I have marked it with two?

*No—not happy: / or if there is any happiness,
Only | the happiness // of knowing
That the misery | does not feed // on the ruin of loveliness,
That the tedium | is not the residue of ecstasy.
I see | that my life // was determined long ago*

¹ *Notebooks*, 238.

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*And that / the struggle // to escape from it
Is only a make-believe, / a pretence
That what is, / is not, // or could be changed.
The self that can say / ‘I want this— // or want that—
The self that wills / —he is a feeble creature;
He has to come / to terms // in the end
With the obstinate, / the tougher self; // who does not speak,
Who never talks, / who cannot argue;
And who / in some men // may be the guardian—
But in men like me, / the dull, // the implacable,
The indomitable / spirit of mediocrity.
The willing self / can contrive // the disaster
Of this unwilling partnership— / but can only flourish
In submission / to the rule // of the stronger partner.*

I suspect that it does not matter very much where the caesura comes, or whether it comes at all, so long as the lines have a natural speech rhythm; and the structure is coherent enough without any attempt to counterpoint it. The stresses are generally obvious, though even in their case the analyst must sometimes hesitate. Take the third line of Edward's speech: it might have been the poet's intention to put the stresses thus:

That the misery does not feed on the ruin of loveliness

or thus:

That thé misery does not féed on the ruin of loveliness

or even:

That the misery does not feed on the ruin of loveliness.

But one should assume that the poet does not wish to stress an adverb that is already sufficiently stressed by sound and position, which would exclude the second possibility. Rhythm's main function is not to underline grammar, nor even to emphasize meaning; but to give ease of movement to phrases.

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In short, I suspect that Mr Eliot, like most of the poets I have been considering, writes verse with a minimum consciousness of rules: that the form of his verse proceeds from the act and condition of its origination. He justifies the created form with objective reasoning, and discovers there certain features of stress or rhythm which, like all such stresses and rhythms enounced under emotional pressure or concentration, exhibit elements of repetition or regularity. Verse, or emotionally heightened utterance, is naturally (and by naturally I mean physically) delivered in bouts or phrases of eight to fifteen syllables; and equally naturally these phrases tend to have three to four stresses.

EDWARD

Damn the telephone.

I suppose I had better answer it.

CELIA

Yes, better answer it.

Such phrases are as natural as could be; and yet they are perfectly good verse: clear, concise, rhythmic, dramatic. But if this is verse, what, then, is poetry?

'A point of intensity', answers Mr Eliot. Poetry is that point of intensity at which the force of the emotions fuses the utterance to a glowing heat. And Mr Eliot admits that it is an open question whether there is any poetry of that kind in *The Cock-tail Party*. When poetry is demanded by the situation, Reilly quotes Shelley. In general, the test of 'strict dramatic utility' excludes poetry. Logically the same test would seem to exclude points of intensity where 'poetry' becomes the appropriate utterance—I am assuming that there is nothing strictly utilitarian in poetry. Mr Eliot can hardly mean his logic to be taken seriously. There is an obvious point of intensity in the play towards the end of Act II, when Celia makes her deci-

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sion. To the last moment the poetry is excluded, but Reilly's final words:

*Go in peace, my daughter.
Work out your salvation with diligence.*

leap out of the utilitarian context—the phrasing is Biblical, the apostrophe poetically metaphorical. And a few moments later there is the libation scene, which certainly breaks 'the ascetic rule'.

Mr Eliot may be right: there may be an incompatibility between poetry and the modern theatre with its prosaic audience.¹ Poetry must be put on a thin diet 'in order to adapt it to the needs of the stage'. If so, while giving every credit to the dramatist that Mr Eliot is and would be, must we not nevertheless regret the poet that he has been? In other words, is drama, which must be in verse, a higher category of artistic achievement than poetry, which cannot be theatrical? Shakespeare evidently did not think so, for there is more poetry of an intense order in his late plays than in his earlier plays. If we turn to the last dramatic work of another poet of our time—the work in which, as Mr Eliot himself admits, Yeats had finally solved the problem of speech in verse, the play *Purgatory*, we find the same freedom of utterance but a very different atmosphere—the atmosphere of a poetry that is more than verse:

*Study that tree.
It stands there like a purified soul,
All cold, sweet, glistening light.*

¹ Cf. Susanne K. Langer: '... I believe the drama is not strictly literature at all. It has a different origin, and uses words as utterances. It is a kindred art, for it produces the same primary illusion as literature, namely the semblance of experienced events, but in a different mode: instead of creating a virtual Past it creates a virtual Present. It is related to literature as sculpture and architecture are related to the graphic arts.' 'The Primary Illusions and the Great Orders of Art', *Hudson Review*, III, 2, 233 (1950).

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*Dear mother, the window is dark again
But you are in the light because
I finished all that consequence.
I killed that lad for he was growing up,
He would soon take some woman's fancy,
Beget and pass pollution on.
I am a wretched foul old man
And therefore harmless. When I have stuck
This old jack-knife into a sod
And pulled it out all bright again,
And picked up all the money that he dropped
I'll to a distant place, and there
Tell my old jokes among new men.*

This is the diction, the poetic diction, of *King Lear* and *The Tempest*: a universal diction, not bound to time or a temporal audience. It would not, perhaps, be acceptable on Broadway or Shaftesbury Avenue; but is that public, the groundlings of a giddy and superficial age, to stand between drama and poetry?¹ Shakespeare's groundlings could scale the heights of Parnassus, to throw their caps in the air: must ours be fed on a thin diet of imperceptible verse?

To put the question in a more direct way: Poetry is, of course, a mode of communication—more exactly, a mode of symbolic communication. It fails if it does not effect a communication. But a surrender to the public demand for discursive means of communication is a renunciation of the specific means of art. Poetry is non-discursive: which does not mean that it cannot be apprehended by the intelligence. Intelligence, in the sense in which the word has been used by philosophers like Plato, Spinoza and Bergson, includes as an active component the liveliness of the sensibility, a feeling for the heights

¹ 'The whole odiousness of the thing', wrote Henry James to his brother William, 'lies in the connection between the drama and the theatre. The one is admirable in its interest and difficulty, the other loathsome in its conditions.'

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and depths, the contours, the *Gestalt* of communication. Sensibility, in our modern civilization, is in decay: is atrophied. To put it on a thin diet is merely to prolong its vapid life. There may be more sense in Pound's shock-therapy. There is, of course, another kind of sensibility with which Mr Eliot is deeply concerned in his recent work—moral sensibility. But he admits that prose—the prose of Ibsen and Chekhov—has proved fully adequate for the dramatic expression of that kind of sensibility. His own dramatic verse seems to me to be a more subtle medium than the prose of either Ibsen or Chekhov, though an ignorance of the languages they wrote in should prevent one from being dogmatic on this point. What remains, beyond both drama and the moral order it can reflect, is what Mr Eliot calls a musical order. I do not see why he should introduce another art at this stage in his argument. Poetry, 'at its moments of greatest intensity', is just as abstract as music. It is abstract because, as Mr Eliot so clearly perceives, it expresses feelings 'of which we are only aware in a kind of temporary detachment from action'. Such feelings cannot be dramatic, for in its origins and evolution drama has always been indissolubly attached to action. Aristotle was very specific about this, not only defining tragedy as the imitation of action and of life, but further indicating that its end is 'a mode of action, *not a quality*'—even going so far as to describe the dramatist as a maker of plots rather than of verses. But poetry is essentially a quality, an abstract quality evoked by concrete images, and Shakespeare is an imperfect dramatist precisely because the poetry keeps breaking in, suspending the action for its moment of existence. There are areas of consciousness which the poet can only enter if he renounces action, and it is difficult to see how the notion of a perfect union of drama and poetry can remain other than the mirage which Mr Eliot has until now had before his eyes. But the whole argument of this book tends to show that the poet

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is capable of transcending the categories of the critic, and the future may have in store for us a form of poetic drama that imitates not so much modes of action as states of sensibility. Mr Eliot has given us some exciting intimations of its nature. There would still remain the task that faced the first romantic poets—that of creating the taste by which such a poetic drama is to be enjoyed.

CHAPTER IX

Conclusion

The poetic reform which Wordsworth and Coleridge began has taken a century and a half to expend its force—a long time for a literary movement to last. But this particular movement has for much of its course run underground, and was never, until our own time, wholly conscious of its direction.

✓ It seems to me that the new feeling for organic form which possessed such typical figures as Goethe and Schelling in Germany, Coleridge and Wordsworth in England, marked a new extension of the general range of human consciousness. It is significant, that in the period we are concerned with, man also became more aware of his own evolutionary process, and of his place in the evolution of the cosmos. Common to the whole of this modern development—in physics, biology, genetics and aesthetics—is a growing awareness of the significance of *form*, and the search for some basic laws of form. An innate ‘tendency to form’ is now discerned in the very organs of human perception and thought, and art is conceived as the means by which the mind succeeds in passing from one fixed form to another fixed form—a process of *transformation*. In the biological world form is related to function—to the process of growth. In art the function of form is symbolical; form is a perceptible symbol for a particular state of mind. ✓ Why the mind should need symbolic modes of representation is a question that need not worry us now, but there is plenty of evidence to suggest that a civilization, and life itself, cannot exist without those symbolic

Conclusion

systems of communication represented by ritual, myth, and art.

Lancelot Law Whyte has suggested¹ that there exists a unitary principle in physics and biology which tends to symmetry of form. Such symmetry is a point of rest, and, biologically speaking, a point of death. There is, therefore, in the interests of life, a counter-tendency to evade the fixed forms of symmetry and to seek new and more flexible organizations of constituent elements. In this sense we may make a distinction between geometric (or systematic) form and organic form.²

The tendency to geometric and symmetric form in art is universal and always ends, unless checked, in academic clichés and rigid patterns which kill the originating force or vitality of art. The process, historically, is generally parallel to a development of social structures of an equally rigid and mortal character. Art, and society, live by virtue of a continuous process of transformation (there is no necessary degree of progress). A relationship may perhaps be established between the capacity for transformation and the possibility, under stress, of further evolution in human consciousness.

Poetry illustrates these general processes. It can die into the symmetrical forms of regular metre and verse; or it can live, and give significant form to an evolving human consciousness, by creating symbols that represent a state of mental awareness or an act of perception. Such symbols in poetry—as distinct from the signs used in discursive language (prose)—are determined by feeling (or intuition), and are not logically analysable. They ‘read’ only as complete expressive units (the-poem-as-a-whole, for example).

¹ *The Unitary Principle in Physics and Biology*. London (Cresset Press), 1949.

² Susanne Langer, in making the same distinction, uses the terms ‘constructed unity’ and ‘organic differentiation of an organic whole’. Cf. ‘Abstraction in Science and Abstraction in Art’, *Structure, Method, and Meaning: Essays in Honor of Henry M. Sheffer*. New York (Liberal Arts Press), 1951, 172.

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The creation of such verbal 'Gestalts' is the function of the poet, and it is a like function that creates a unity of melody and harmony in music, or a compositional unity in painting or sculpture, each act of creation being unique, and not typical. Poetry is the representation, in verbal symbols, of a unique mental situation. There are, of course, mental situations that are commonplace or typical, but they can be described in discursive prose.

Though these matters have now become the concern of the latest developments in philosophy and logic, they were present as basic intuitions in the work of the poets and philosophers at the beginning of the Romantic Movement, and are fully apprehended, for example, by Schelling in the lecture to which I have drawn attention (Appendix, page 321).

Throughout the history of human culture we are continuously made aware of two possibilities of aesthetic expression or communication, one being what Keats called 'the false beauty proceeding from art', which is expression conceived as an elaboration of selected elements of perception and feeling; the other being what Keats called 'the true voice of feeling', which is expression conceived as the direct communication by precise symbolic means of the configuration of perception and feeling, 'the pattern of sentience'. There can be no compromise between these two conceptions of art, one being the classical conception of art as artifice or play, the other being the romantic conception of art as the communication of an increasingly acute awareness of the nature of experience, of art as the cult of sincerity.¹ ✓

¹ It is noteworthy that when Professor Huizinga, in his remarkable attempt to explain all culture as an outcome of the play-element (*Homo Ludens. A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*. Trans. by R. F. C. Hull. London, 1949), comes in due course to Romanticism, he has to confess that 'insofar as Romanticism and kindred movements are divorced from ritual we shall inevitably, in our assessment of them, be assailed by the most vexing ambiguities'. Art becomes too serious for the theory, and because 'Realism, Naturalism, Impressionism . . .

Conclusion

Sincerity has no fixed form, and does not give birth to any fixed forms. It is as various as feeling. What I have been anxious to demonstrate is that there are at least two forms of art, and two types of poetry. One is the elaboration of the given reality, of the classified data of experience. It is a grace added to life: a plaything. The other is an extension of the given reality, an extension of experience, an exercise of consciousness.

This latter type of art, which, following Yeats, I have called 'the cult of sincerity', is not possible to all artists—is not congenial to their capacities. It is characteristic only of a few representative geniuses in widely separated epochs. It arises whenever the spirit of man becomes aware of the deadliness of habit and is eager to test the unrealized potentialities of the human mind.

were all emptier of the play-spirit than any of the earlier styles had been', they are dismissed as a 'dull catalogue of literary and pictorial coteries', to be equated with long trousers and top-hats!

PART TWO

ESSAYS ANCILLARY TO THE
MAIN THEME

ESSAY I

Coleridge as Critic

In concentrating on Coleridge's critical philosophy, which is my present intention, I am requiring from the reader a certain act of renunciation. There is no figure, in the whole history of English literature, who is so intrinsically fascinating, and a very pleasant hour might be spent recalling Coleridge's personality in all its suggestiveness, its infinite variety and, to use his own word, its *multeity*. There is an entry in the recently published *Notebooks* of Henry James which well expresses this fatal attractiveness. That connoisseur in character, in dramatic situations, in psychological subtleties, had been reading the then recently published biography of Coleridge written by Dykes Campbell, and he says that he 'was infinitely struck with the suggestiveness of S.T.C.'s figure—wonderful, admirable figure—for pictorial treatment. What a subject some particular cluster of its relations would make for a little story, a small vivid picture. There was a point, as I read, at which I seemed to see a little story—to have a quick glimpse of the possible drama. Would not such a drama necessarily be the question of the acceptance by someone—someone with something important at stake—of the general *responsibility* of rising to the height of accepting him for what he is, recognizing his rare, anomalous, magnificent, interesting, curious, tremendously suggestive character, vices and all, with all its imperfections on its head, and *not* being guilty of the pedantry, the stupidity, the want of imagination, of fighting him, deplored him in the details—fail-

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ing to recognize that one *must* pay for him and that on the whole he is magnificently worth it.'¹

From that particular suggestion emerged, eventually, one of James's best stories—*The Coxon Fund*. Though our aims are so different, and have no dramatic effect in view, yet the injunctions that Henry James proposed to himself are not altogether irrelevant to our purpose. In particular, we must accept Coleridge for what he was, not merely as a person, but as an intellect, 'vices and all'; and we must not be guilty of a partial portrait, of a selection of evidence designed to present a critic merely congenial—a critic of vivid perceptions, of penetrating insight—to the neglect of all that constituted the real substance and capacity of the man and his mind.

The danger is a real one, and has not been avoided by writers on Coleridge. We need not, I think, take too seriously those who try to dissociate the poet and the philosopher. An eminent dichotomist of this school was the late Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, who put forward the suggestion that Coleridge was a poet up to the moment he went to Germany, a young man of twenty-six. 'He had landed in Germany,' writes Sir Arthur, 'a poet; and a poet, so to speak, with his hand in; his mind flushed with recent poetic feats, quick with poetry to come. He embarked from Germany . . . a poet lost . . . came back to England intensely and furiously preoccupied with metaphysics. *This*,' suggests Sir Arthur, 'this and neither opium nor Mrs Coleridge's fretfulness, was the main reason why he could not recall his mind to poetry . . .'²

Admittedly there is a psychological problem; for some reason Coleridge was henceforth to find it increasingly difficult to write poetry; and in that wonderful but pathetic Ode:

¹ *The Notebooks of Henry James*. Ed. by F. O. Matthiessen and Kenneth B. Murdoch. New York, 1947, p. 152.

² Introduction to *Biographia Literaria*. Ed. by G. Sampson, Cambridge, 1920, p. xxiv.

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Dejection, which he wrote in his thirtieth year, and in which he openly confessed the failing of his ‘genial spirits’, he carried the psychological analysis of his mental state to a point of realistic revelation on which no external investigator is ever likely to improve. This Ode must be read in its original form, first published by Professor de Selincourt in 1937, for there Coleridge reveals the real source of his affliction:

*my coarse domestic Life has known
No habits of heart-nursing Sympathy,
No Griefs but such as dull and deaden me,
No mutual mild Enjoyments of its own,
No Hopes of its own Vintage, None O! none—
Whence when I mourn’d for you, my Heart might borrow
Fair forms and living Motions for its Sorrow.*¹

and then come lines for long familiar, but which lost some of their force from being separated from the immediately preceding lines I have just quoted:

*For not to think of what I needs must feel,
But to be still and patient all I can;
And haply by abstruse Research to steal
From my own Nature, all the Natural man—
This was my sole Resource, my wisest plan!
And that, which suits a part, infects the whole,
And now is almost grown the Temper of my Soul.*

Writing in this same year 1802, about four months after the composition of this Ode, Coleridge confessed to Southey that ‘all my poetic genius (if ever I really possessed any *genius*, and it was not rather a more general aptitude of talent and quickness in imitation) is gone, and I have been fool enough to suffer deeply in my mind, regretting the loss, which I attri-

¹ The complete text is given by de Selincourt in his *Wordsworthian and Other Studies*. Oxford, 1947, pp. 67–76. Cf. above, pp. 30–37.

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bute to my long and exceedingly severe metaphysical investigations, and these partly to ill-health, and partly to private afflictions which rendered any subjects, immediately connected with feeling, a source of pain and disquiet to me.'¹

At first sight this might seem to confirm Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch's theory, that metaphysics destroyed the poet in Coleridge. But in another letter written only sixteen days earlier, Coleridge had said: 'Metaphysics is a word that you, my dear sir, are not a great friend to, but yet you will agree with me that a great poet must be *implicité*, if not *explicité*, a profound metaphysician';² and there is that still more uncompromising statement in the *Biographia Literaria*: 'No man was ever yet a great poet, without being at the same time a profound philosopher.'³ The greatest poetry, as we shall see when we come to discuss Coleridge's theory of poetry, is precisely that in which 'the creative power and the intellectual energy wrestle as in a war embrace'.

The truth of the matter is, I think, that the concentration demanded by metaphysical investigations is a better anodyne for private afflictions than poetry, for in poetry the emotions are involved. But this does not imply, and Coleridge never for a moment entertained the idea, that metaphysics was foreign to poetry, or destructive of poetic genius. Coleridge repeatedly asserts that but for his afflictions he would have made it his business to embody his philosophy in his poetry; more exactly, to make poetry an instrument of metaphysical research.

It will already be evident that one of my main objects is to defend the philosopher in Coleridge. It would be outside my scope, and, indeed, beyond my capacity, to defend Coleridge's philosophy as such. But I shall try to show the relevance of the philosophy to the criticism and further, and in

¹ *Letters* (1895), I, 388.

² *Ibid.*, 372

³ *Biog. Lit.* Ed. by Shawcross. Oxford, 1907. II, 19.

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this departing from most predecessors in this field, I shall maintain that the criticism was deepened—was, indeed, given another and greater dimension, by its dependence on a definite philosophical method.

Writing in 1840, six years after Coleridge's death, John Stuart Mill expressed the opinion that 'the class of thinkers has scarcely yet arisen by whom Coleridge [as a philosopher] is to be judged. The limited philosophical public of this country is as yet too exclusively divided between those to whom Coleridge and the views which he promulgated or defended are everything, and those to whom they are nothing. A true thinker can only be justly estimated when his thoughts have worked their way into minds formed in a different school; have been wrought and moulded into consistency with all other true and relevant thoughts; when the noisy conflict of half-truths, angrily denying one another, has subsided, and ideas which seemed mutually incompatible, have been found only to require mutual limitations. This time,' concluded Mill, 'has not yet come for Coleridge.'¹

The Transcendental Philosophy, of which Coleridge was a late but brilliant luminary, has long ago taken its due place in the historical perspective of philosophy. Certain subsequent schools, of which the most contentious have been Hegelianism, dialectical materialism, positivism and pragmatism, have obscured for a time the originality and perennial force of that mansion of thought whose foundations were laid by Kant, whose glittering pinnacles were completed by Coleridge, Novalis and Kierkegaard. I must speak with caution in a country where pragmatism, I am told, is still regarded as the national philosophy; but if I am not mistaken, here as well as in Europe there has been in recent years a return to a more idealistic attitude in philosophy. This is shown in the remark-

¹ *London and Westminster Review*, March, 1840. Reprinted in *Dissertations and Discussions*, Vol. I, 1867, pp. 397-8.

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able interest now shown in Kierkegaard, and in the spread of a philosophy which, in some three distinct varieties, is known as *existentialism*. It will become evident as we proceed that Coleridge, no less than Kierkegaard, comes within the range of this revivalism.

Much research has been devoted to the origins of Coleridge's philosophy, and a controversy, not lacking animosity, has continued from Coleridge's own day to our own. There has been a charge, not merely of derivation, but even of dishonest plagiarism, to which the untidy literary habits of Coleridge yielded only too much evidence. Coleridge himself was aware of this accusation, and showed himself rightly sensitive to the imputation of dishonesty. He did his best to answer the charge, and in various contexts, made generous admission of his debts. I do not wish to spend any time going over the well-trodden grounds of this dispute, but it is desirable, for my purpose, to establish the main sources of Coleridge's philosophy—to allot the credits, as they say in Hollywood.

Coleridge was polymath. He took all knowledge for his province, and from the day when 'the old Grey Friars re-echoed to the accents of the *inspired charity-boy*', as his schoolmate Charles Lamb called him, 'the young Mirandula, waxing, even in those early years, not pale at philosophic draughts of Jamblichus or Plotinus,' from that day until his death Coleridge continued to absorb knowledge from all quarters. He never lost his zest for learning, and a list of authors and works quoted in his writings would in itself fill a volume. It is never safe to assume that Coleridge had not read anything published before the year of his death. I remember my astonishment in discovering that he had read Vico's *Scienza Nuova*, long before Michelet rescued that great name from oblivion.¹

¹ It was lent to him by an Italian lawyer called Dr De Prati. See *Unpublished Letters*, II, 374. He was reading it when, in 1825, he paid a visit to Ramsgate, as we learn from the following characteristic note in a letter to Gillman: 'To

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When we say that Coleridge took all knowledge for his province we must insist on the literal meaning of the phrase. It is not always remembered what a part the natural sciences played in his development. His main motive in going to Germany in 1798, apart from acquiring proficiency in the language, was to study chemistry and anatomy, mechanics and optics, philology and ethnology. His appetite was inordinate, his ambitions sublime. 'I should not think', he wrote to Cottle, 'of devoting less than twenty years to an epic poem. Ten years to collect materials and warm my mind with universal science. I would thoroughly understand Mechanics; Hydrostatics; Optics and Astronomy; Botany; Metallurgy; Fossilism; Chemistry; Geology; Anatomy; Medicine; then the mind of man; then the minds of Men, in all Travels, Voyages and Histories. So I would spend ten years; the next five in the composition of the poem, and the five last in the correction of it. So would I write, haply not unhearing of that divine and nightly-whispering voice, which speaks to mighty minds, of pre-destinated garlands, starry and unwithering.'¹ Alas, that divine and nightly-whispering voice was to fail him, but there is no doubt that he carried out the first part of this programme. At Göttingen he took courses, not only in German language and literature, but also in physiology and natural history. The study of philosophy was for a time postponed, but not forgotten; for Coleridge came back from Germany with £30 worth of 'metaphysical' books, and it was these which were destined to have a decisive influence on his own philosophy.

Margate, and saw the caverns, as likewise smelt the same, called on Mr Bailey, and got the *Novum Organum*. In my hurry, I scrambled up the Blackwood instead of a volume of Giovanni Battista Vico, which I left on the table in my room, and forgot my sponge and sponge-bag of oiled silk. But perhaps when I sit down to work, I may have to request something to be sent, which may come with them.' *Letters*, II, 744.

¹ *Biog. Epistolaris*, I, 130 (May, 1797).

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In assessing the relative importance of these influences it is well to have some regard to Coleridge's own statements, which often betray a significant emphasis. There is no doubt that the year in Germany was a decisive watershed in his intellectual development. The impact of the systematic atmosphere of a German university—and, one might say, the impact of a nation in a state of vivid intellectual awareness—all this sufficed to make him realize that in his previous studies he had merely floundered—that his head was stored with 'crude notions'. What these crude notions were we know well: they were the product of a rapid and uncritical absorption of such mutually incompatible philosophies as those represented, on the one hand, by Plato and the Neoplatonists, Christian mystics like Jakob Boehme and William Law, the English divines and theologians, and, on the other hand, the much more sceptical tradition of Locke, Hume, Voltaire, Condillac and Hartley. In the midst of these contending forces Coleridge had held on to what he called 'an exclusive consciousness of God', a faith, the consequence of a deliberate act of the will, enlightened by intuition, but defiant of the logical processes of the intellect. He had held on to this rock of faith, but there is no doubt that, at the time he went to Germany, his mind was 'perplexed'. He remained, as he says in the *Biographia Literaria*, a zealous Unitarian; he considered the *idea* of the Trinity a fair inference from the being of God; but he had doubts about the Incarnation, the redemption by the Cross, and many other matters of doctrine. 'A more thorough revolution in my philosophic principles, and a deeper insight into my own heart, were yet wanting'—such was his own analysis of the situation.¹

It is tempting to consider how those doubts were resolved, but I must not be led astray from my main topic, which is Coleridge's critical philosophy. But Coleridge only estab-

¹ *Biog. Lit.*, I, 137.

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lished a critical philosophy as part of his general philosophy, and his critical activity cannot fairly be separated from his metaphysical activity—in fact, the epithet ‘critical’, in his case as in Kant’s, is rather more important than the substantive ‘philosophy’. The ‘critique’ is a method of indirect affirmation. Kant felt that he could best establish the truth by criticizing the methods of reasoning, especially those used by Hume. We shall see that Coleridge made the criticism of *method* the basis of his aesthetics.

What Coleridge owed to the critical philosophy of Kant, or to the Transcendentalists as a school, cannot be established accurately. Let us realize, once and for all, that we are not dealing with the scholarly lucubrations of an academic coterie, in which priorities and credits are of some importance. Coleridge was involved in something much wider and more fundamental—in a revolution of thought such as only occurs once or twice in a millennium. Such revolutions do not come about as a result of individual efforts: the individuals are swept along in a current which they, least of all men, can control. Kant’s philosophy is inconceivable without the stimulus of Hume; Fichte is inconceivable without Kant, and Schelling without Fichte. Let us rather visualize this whole movement of thought as a fleet of vessels moving towards new and uncharted seas. Kant and Fichte, Schleiermacher and Schelling; Herder and the two Schlegels; Goethe and Schiller; Tieck, Novalis and Wackenroder—so many vessels advancing in the stream of thought, flashing signals from one masthead to another, and all guided on their way by the lodestar of transcendental truth. As they proceed from some harbour in the Baltic, they are joined by solitary vessels from neighbouring countries, and Coleridge is one of these, already armed and provisioned, his course set to the same destination.

Of his fellow-voyagers, Coleridge was to select two for closest alliance. We need not dismiss his obligations to the

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Schlegels, nor to Lessing and Schiller (Schiller in particular offers a correspondence of *aim*, as of endowments, which bring him into close sympathy). But Coleridge himself, by the warmth and fullness of his acknowledgments, gave fullest credit to Kant and Schelling. Of Kant he said that he had taken possession of him 'as with the giant's hand'; that he had 'at once invigorated and disciplined' his understanding; and after fifteen years' familiarity with his works, he still read them 'with undiminished delight and unceasing admiration'.¹ That is humble discipleship; but towards Schelling, to whom his acknowledgments were equally full, he indicated a somewhat different, and perhaps more significant relationship. 'In Schelling,' he said, 'I first found a genial coincidence with much that I had toiled out for myself, and a powerful assistance *in what I had yet to do.*' What had yet to be done was the application of Kant's dynamic philosophy to one or two spheres which had only been vaguely indicated by the master. Of his followers, with the partial exception of Fichte, only Schelling, in Coleridge's view, had succeeded in completing the system, in consolidating its victories. In what remained to be done, the application of the system to 'the most awful of subjects for the most important of purposes', only Schelling's aid was of any real value.

Let me now try to recall, very briefly, the significant links between Kant and Schelling, and then we shall be in a better position to see how Coleridge added to them. A drastic simplification will be necessary.

The exceptional nature of aesthetic judgments—that is to say, of the mental experience involved whenever a distinction of inherent value or worth is made between one work of art

¹ *Biog. Lit.*, I, 99. Cf. *Letters*, 682. '... I reverence Kant with my whole heart and soul and believe him to be the only philosopher, for all men who have the power of thinking. I cannot conceive the liberal pursuit or profession, in which the service derived from a patient study of his works would not be incalculably great, both as cathartic, tonic, and directly nutritious.'

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and another—was first recognized by Leibnitz. But there it remained—an anomaly unaccounted for—until Kant, in his *Critique of Judgment*, established a connection between the formal purposiveness of nature and the creative freedom of the artist. Kant did not venture beyond the suggestion of various analogies—beauty, for example, became the *symbol* of morality, and the creative activity in art the dynamic counterpart of the teleological principle of the universe. Kant was not himself an artist; he had no inner experience of the creative activity, and his use of illustrative material is conventional and uncertain. But Schelling, whose ambition it was to complete the transcendental philosophy, though perhaps not a very good poet, was at any rate a man of sensibility, with a keen appreciation of all the arts. On the basis of this appreciative knowledge he ventured to go a step beyond Kant, to pass from mere analogies to absolute identification. Art becomes ‘the only true and enduring organon and document of philosophy’—‘the keystone of its entire arch’. He imagined, as basic to the universe, an energy, or creative impulse which, when unconscious, is manifested as nature; when conscious, as art. The objective world, which is unconscious, becomes conscious in the subjective activity of the ego—the conscious and the unconscious meet and are unified in the state of consciousness. The ideal work of art and the real world of objects are products of one and the same aesthetic activity. Art is the only permanent revelation of the nature of reality. He asks us to think of nature as a poem hidden in a secret and mysterious writing. If the secret could be revealed we should find that it was an odyssey of the human spirit; but the more we strive after its meaning, the more elusive it becomes. The senses, which are our only key, are baffled by a veil of words. It is like trying to get a glimpse of fairyland through fleeting clouds. A painting, too, which only comes to life when the veil between the real and the ideal world is lifted, is merely an aper-

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ture through which are projected the forms of the world of the imagination, which in its turn is a shimmering reflection of the real world. For the artist nature is much the same as it is for the philosopher—the ideal world manifesting itself under continual limitations. It is the incomplete reflection of a world that exists, not outside but within the artist.¹ This, admittedly, is still a very metaphorical manner of philosophizing, and a contemporary like Schiller, who had more practical experience of the poetic activity, rightly accused Schelling of putting the cart before the horse. Poetry, he pointed out, sets out from the unconscious and its difficulty consists in knowing how to realize, to make actual, the vague intimations that the poet derives from his unconscious, without at the same time sacrificing the vitality of the inspiration. The poet somehow has to manage to combine thought and sensibility, intuition and reflection.² Coleridge's point of departure from Schelling is of exactly the same nature.

If we were considering Coleridge as a philosopher, rather than as a critic, we should have to trace his relationship to

¹ Cf. *System des transzendentalen Idealismus* (1800), pp. 475–6.

² Schiller, like Coleridge, always referred his theories to his own practical experience as a poet. Cf. his illuminating criticism of Schelling in a letter to Goethe, 27 March, 1801: ‘He assumes that, in the realm of nature, one should take as a point of departure what is without consciousness, in order to attain to consciousness; whilst, in the realm of art, one sets out from consciousness to attain the unconscious. . . . I am afraid that these idealists do not profit much from experience; for experience teaches that the poet's unique point of departure is in the unconscious; I would even say that the poet should count himself lucky if he succeeds, more or less, while making use of a consciousness fully aware of its mode of operation, in recovering in the finished work, unattenuated, the first and still obscure total-idea which he had conceived of his work. Lack-ing such a total-idea, obscure but powerful, anterior to all technical apparatus, it is not possible for any poetic work to be born; and poetry, if I am not mis-taken, consists precisely in knowing how to express and communicate this unconscious—in other words, in knowing how to embody it in an objective work of art.’ The whole letter deserves careful reading, for like everything that Schiller wrote on aesthetic theory, it is full of wise perceptions and anticipations of later theories of art.

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Schelling in much more detail; but enough, perhaps, has been said to establish a necessary connection. The distinction of Coleridge, which puts him head and shoulders above every other English critic, is due to his introduction of a philosophical method of criticism. English criticism before his time, in the hands of a Dryden, a Warton or a Johnson, had been a criticism of technique, of craftsmanship—sometimes presupposing some general rules, such as that of dramatic unity, but oftener a merely mechanical, and at best an individualistic and arbitrary activity, resulting in such perversities, or rather inadequacies, as Johnson's remarks on Shakespeare. Coleridge changed all that. 'The science of Criticism', he himself observed, 'dates its restoration from the time when it was seen that an examination and appreciation of the end was necessarily antecedent to the formation of the rules, supplying at once the principle of the rules themselves, and of their application to the given subject. From this time we have heard little (among intelligent persons, I mean) of the wildness and irregularity of our Shakespeare. Nay, when once the end which our myriad-minded Bard had in view, and the local accidents that favoured or obstructed or in any way modified its manifestations are once thoroughly comprehended, the doubt will arise whether the judgment or the genius of the man has the stronger claim to our wonder, or rather it will be felt that the judgment was the birth and living offspring of his genius even as the symmetry of a body results from the sanity and vigour of the life as an organizing power.'¹

The 'method' that Coleridge introduced into criticism is expounded in a series of brilliant essays which make up the Second Section of *The Friend*, one of the few parts of his work on which Coleridge himself looked back with any satisfaction.²

¹ MS. *Logic*. Cf. Snyder, *Coleridge on Logic and Learning*, Yale, 1929, p. 110.

² 'Were it in my power, my works should be confined to the second volume of my "Literary Life", the Essays of the third volume of the "Friend" (Section

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Method is said to become natural 'to the mind which has become accustomed to contemplate not things only, or for their own sake alone, but likewise and chiefly the relations of things, either their relations to each other, or to the observer, or to the state and apprehension of the hearers. To enumerate and analyse these relations, with the conditions under which alone they are discoverable, is to teach the science of method.'¹

To avoid the impression that method is merely a sterile system of classification, Coleridge illustrated its meaning from the art of Shakespeare. He sees it as 'the unpremeditated and evidently habitual arrangement of . . . words, grounded on the habit of foreseeing, in each integral part, or (more plainly) in every sentence, the whole that the poet then intends to communicate'.² Mrs Quickly's relation of the circumstances of Sir John Falstaff's debt to her is given as Shakespeare's illustration of the want of method in the uneducated; and the habitual use of method is shown by contrast in Hamlet's account of the events which accompanied his proposed transportation to England. Then, making further use of this same illustration, Coleridge shows how an 'exuberance of mind . . . interferes with the forms of method; but sterility of mind, on the other hand, wanting the spring and impulse to mental action, is wholly destructive of method itself'.³ 'The terms system, method, science, are mere improprieties of courtesy, when applied to a mass enlarging by endless appositions, but without a nerve that oscillates, or a pulse that throbs, in sign of growth or inward sympathy'.⁴ He brings this analysis down to a significant point—significant, I mean, for Cole-

II), with about fifty or sixty pages from the two former volumes, and some half-dozen of my poems.' Letter to J. Britton, 28 Feb. 1819. Cf. Raynor, *Shakespearian Criticism*, Vol. II, p. 326.

¹ *The Friend* (4th edn., 1850), III, 108.

² *Ibid.*, p. 104.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

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ridge's whole philosophy—the necessity, in all mental processes, for 'a staple, or starting-post, in the narrator himself'. Mental confusion is due to 'the absence of the leading thought, which', (and here Coleridge is introducing one of the terms which have since become current in literary criticism) 'borrowing a phrase from the nomenclature of legislation, I may not inaptly call the initiative'. Granted a starting-post, then 'things most remote and diverse in time, place, and outward circumstance, are brought into mental contiguity and succession, the more striking as the less expected.'¹ But the method must not be stretched into despotism—that way lies the grotesque and the fantastical. 'Confusion and formality are but the opposite poles of the same null-point.' Method, true method, implies 'a progressive transition', and for a transition to be continuous there must be a preconception. Thus in Shakespeare, 'in all his various characters, we still feel ourselves communicating with the same nature, which is every where present as the vegetable sap in the branches, sprays, leaves, buds, blossoms, and fruits, their shapes, tastes, and odours.' The excellence of Shakespeare consists in 'that just proportion, that union and interpenetration, of the universal and particular, which must ever pervade all works of decided genius and true science'.²

Coleridge reveals his debt to Kant and Schelling in all that follows, but he is everywhere giving the critical method his own application. He distinguishes between two kinds of relation—that of *law* (which is the Kantian conception of the category, of the truth originating in the mind) and that of *theory*, which is the relation of cause and effect, leading to the generalizations of science, the arrangement of the many under one point of view. Between these two relations, says Cole-ridge, lies method in the fine arts, which is partly a synthetical activity based on knowledge and experience, but this activity

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

² *Ibid.*, p. 116.

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dominated by the intuitive conceptions of the artist. Coleridge described the process by means of which this domination is achieved as 'esemplastic', a word which has never taken root in our language. Whatever he might call it he always had in mind his own creative experience as a poet, and it is that fact which gives a sense of realism to all his theorizing. In this he was but following his own maxim, to the effect that in order to recognize his place in nature, man must first learn to comprehend nature in himself, and its laws in the grounds of his own existence. In this spirit Coleridge becomes the first psychologist in criticism—he was, indeed, the first literary critic to make use of the very word 'psychology'.

This psychological analysis of the workings of the poetic process in himself, and, so far as external examination could yield the facts, of the same process in his friend Wordsworth, led Coleridge to formulate what I would call the romantic principle in art. To this principle he gave several formulations, but the substance of them does not vary. From Schelling he had got the idea that art was 'a dim analogue of creation'; but creation itself was the process to be rendered a little less dim. In the separate tasks assigned to himself and Wordsworth in the composition of the *Lyrical Ballads*, while Wordsworth was to 'consider the influences of fancy and imagination as they are manifested in poetry', Coleridge's task was 'to investigate the seminal principle' itself. Wordsworth was to sketch 'the branches with their poetic fruitage'; Coleridge 'to add the trunk, and even the roots as far as they lift themselves above the ground, and are visible to the naked eye of our common consciousness.'¹

Professor Raynor, whose editorial work on Coleridge has put us all under a great debt, has described Coleridge's theory of the imagination as 'eccentric' and 'unfortunate'; and Coleridge himself as 'a mediocre philosopher'.² I do not know

¹ *Biog. Lit.*, I, 64.

² *Shakespearian Criticism*, pp. xxxiii n., xlvi n.

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from what more positive standpoint Professor RAYSOR is criticizing the critic and philosopher to whom he has given such loving care; but from my own standpoint I must dissent from these strictures. Its terminology apart, I believe that Coleridge's theory of the imagination has been proved essentially sound by later and more scientific researches; and as for his philosophy, I would now like to suggest that in this sphere, too, Coleridge, so far from being mediocre, anticipated in many important respects the point of view to which the philosophy of our own time is busily returning.

Coleridge was convinced that the imagination, in its highest potency, was something 'essentially *vital*'.¹ He also felt that its source was in the unconscious—'there is in genius itself,' he said, 'an unconscious activity; nay, that is *the* genius in the man of genius'.² What Coleridge meant by the unconscious, and what Schelling meant by it, is not in doubt; they both make frequent references to the unconscious activity of the dream, and they were both directly influenced by Mesmer, from whose pioneer work on hypnosis developed, in good time, the whole theory of a dynamic unconscious that Freud made the basis of his doctrine and practice of psycho-analysis. For Coleridge, as for Schelling, the unconscious was a reality of immense psychological significance.³

The distinction between reason and understanding was, of course, of ancient origin; and Plato had been aware of the irrational sources of inspiration. But Fichte was perhaps the

¹ *Biog. Lit.*, I, 202.

² *Misc. Crit.*, 210.

³ There is a beautiful illustration of his conception of the interaction of body and mind at the end of Lecture XIII of the course of 1818 (*Misc. Crit.*, p. 213), repeated in the essay 'On Poesy or Art'. Cf. *Biog. Lit.*, Vol. II, p. 263. 'The seeming identity of body and mind in infants, and thence the loveliness of the former. The commencing separation in boyhood, the struggle of equilibrium in youth; from thence onward the body first indifferent, then demanding the translucency of the mind not to be worse than indifferent; and finally, all that presents the body as body becoming almost of an excremental nature.' In such a manner, perhaps, Schelling might have conceived his '*Odysee des Geistes*'.

first philosopher to elaborate a threefold principle of knowledge. On the basis of Fichte's analysis, Schelling distinguished three 'potencies'. Again, I must stop on the threshold of metaphysics, but I think it can be stated, quite simply, that these three potencies of Schelling's represent, first, an irrational non-ego; second, rational consciousness; and finally, a development of rational consciousness into a higher form of subjective consciousness. It has already been pointed out by an American scholar, Dr Bolman, of Columbia, that Schelling's use of the three potencies in psychic life corresponds to Freud's threefold description of personality in terms of the id, the ego, and the super-ego.¹

Now let us turn to Coleridge's theory of the imagination. He begins by telling us what the transcendental philosophy demands—first, that two forces should be conceived which contradict each other by their essential nature; secondly, that these forces should be assumed to be both alike infinite, both alike indestructible. 'The problem will then be to discover the result or product of two such forces, as distinguished from the result of those forces which are finite . . .' The next step is 'to elevate the thesis from notional to actual, by contemplating intuitively this one power with its two inherent indestructible yet counteracting forces, and the results or generations to which their interpenetration gives existence, in the living principle and in the process of our own self-consciousness. By what instrument this is possible the solution itself will discover, at the same time that it will reveal to and for whom it is possible.'²

The one power that issues from the interpenetration of these two assumed forces, Coleridge adds, is 'inexhaustibly re-ebullient'—it cannot be neutralized, but must issue as a

¹ Frederick de Wolfe Bolman, Jr., in his edition of Schelling's *The Ages of the World*, Columbia Univ. Press, 1942, p. 166 n.

² *Biog. Lit.*, I, 197–8.

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tertium quid, in finite generation. ‘This tertium quid can be no other than an interpenetration of the counteracting powers, partaking of both.’¹

Having delivered this flight into ‘High German Transcendentalism’, Coleridge breaks off to interpose in his *Biographia Literaria* that ‘very judicious letter’ from a friend ‘whose practical judgment I have ample reason to estimate and revere’, namely himself; a letter in which he anticipates with humour and modesty the objections of those who, like Professor Raynor, regret his meddling in metaphysics—of the many, as he says, to whose minds his speculations on the esemplastic power will be utterly unintelligible. He then gives, in summary form, his famous definition of the Imagination, in its threefold potency—namely:

- ✓ the *primary* imagination, the living Power and Prime Agent of all human Perception;
- ‘the *secondary* imagination, an echo of the primary, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still identical with the primary in the *kind* of its agency, and differing only in *degree*, and in the *mode* of its operation;
- ‘and finally the *fancy*, no other than a mode of memory emancipated from the order of time and place, blended with and modified by that empirical phenomenon of the will, which we express by the word *choice*.’ ✓

These summary definitions are amplified and illustrated throughout the whole of Coleridge’s literary criticism, and it is my contention that that criticism derives its penetrative power from the use of the systematic method he had established by his philosophical speculations. I have already mentioned the famous illustration of Shakespeare’s poetic use of method; illustrations of Coleridge’s own critical use of method abound in his lectures and miscellaneous writings. One ex-

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

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ample will suffice—the blinding sword that he drives between the talents of Beaumont and Fletcher and the genius of Shakespeare. ‘What had a grammatical and logical consistency for the ear,’ he said, ‘what could be put together and represented to the eye, these poets (Beaumont and Fletcher) took from the ear and eye, unchecked by any intuition of an inward impossibility, just as a man might fit together a quarter of an orange, a quarter of an apple, and the like of a lemon and a pomegranate, and make it look like one round diverse coloured fruit. But nature, who works from within by evolution and assimilation according to a law, cannot do it. Nor could Shakespeare, for he too worked in the spirit of nature, by evolving the germ within by the imaginative power according to an idea—for as the power of seeing is to light, so is an idea in mind to a law in nature. They are correlatives that suppose each other.’¹

This, let me say in parenthesis, is one more statement of what I have called the romantic principle—the idea that the imagination is a shaping power, an energy which fuses, melts and recombines the elements of perception, and bodies them forth in a unity or synthesis which is the work of art.² Coleridge everywhere insists on the difference between ‘form as proceeding’ and ‘shape as super-induced’—‘the latter is either the death or the imprisonment of the thing;—the former is its self-witnessing and self-effected sphere of agency’.³ And this, of course, is the precise difference between classical and romantic art.³

But Coleridge, in his lecture on Beaumont and Fletcher, went on to make a further distinction which he regarded as

¹ *Misc. Crit.*, 42–3.

² ‘On Poesy or Art’, *Biog. Lit.*, II, 262.

³ But one should recognize that some so-called classical art is, in the sense of Coleridge’s distinction, romantic (Euripides, for example; even Racine), and that some so-called romantic art is classical (much of Goethe, for example; even Wordsworth). The real distinction is between academic art and personal art; between ‘tradition and the individual talent’.

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of the utmost importance—‘Shakespeare shaped his characters out of the nature within; but we cannot so safely say, out of *his own* nature, as an *individual person*. No! this latter is itself but a *natura naturata*, an effect, a product, not a *power*. It was Shakespeare’s prerogative to have the universal which is potentially in each *particular*, opened out to him in the *homo generalis*, not as an abstraction of observation from a variety of men, but as a substance capable of endless modifications, of which his own personal existence was but one, and to use *this one* as the eye that beheld the other, and as the tongue that could convey the discovery.’¹ Here again Coleridge is anticipating the hypotheses of modern psychology, for what seems to be suggested in this passage is some conception such as that of a *collective unconscious*, a deep store of phyletic experience to which the poet has direct access, and of which he is the inspired exponent. Inspiration, however, is no arbitrary process; nor is beauty a copy of the mere externals of nature. The artist must master the essence, the *natura naturans*, ‘which presupposes a bond between nature in the highest sense and the soul of man. . . . Man’s mind is the very focus of the rays of intellect which are scattered throughout the images of nature. Now so to place these images, totalized, and fitted to the limits of the human mind, as to elicit from, and to superinduce upon, the forms themselves the moral reflexions to which they approximate, to make the external internal, the internal external, to make nature thought, and thought nature—this is the mystery of genius in the Fine Arts.’²

The process might be illustrated in Coleridge’s all too brief references to the function of language in poetry. Coleridge realized, long before the theory of *Einfühlung* or Empathy had been formulated, that ‘to know is to resemble’. The artist ‘must imitate that which is within the thing, that which is active through form and figure, and discourses to us by sym-

¹ *Misc. Crit.*, 43–4.

² ‘On Poesy or Art’, *Biog. Lit.*, II, 257–8.

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bols—the *Natur-geist*, or spirit of nature, as we unconsciously imitate those we love, for so only can he hope to produce any work truly natural in the object and truly human in the effect. The idea which puts the form together cannot itself be the form. It is above form, and is its essence, the universal in the individual, or the individuality itself—the glance and the exponent of the indwelling power.¹ Following up this notion there is a passage on language in one of Coleridge's unpublished Notebooks which runs:

‘A man of Genius using a rich and expressive language (the Greek, German, or English) is an excellent instance and illustration of the ever individualizing process and dynamic Being, of Ideas. What a magnificent History of acts of individual minds, sanctioned by the collective Mind of the Country, a Language is—This Hint well deserves to be evolved and expounded in a more auspicious moment. Qy whether words as the already organized Materials of the higher Organic Life . . . may not after a given period, become *effete*? How rightly shall we conceive this marvellous Result, a Language?—A chaos grinding itself into compatibility. But this would give only the Negative attributes.’²

Coleridge was never to find an auspicious moment to evolve and expand this hint, though in his criticism of Wordsworth's poetry he distinguishes between ‘words used as the *arbitrary marks* of thought, our smooth market-coin of intercourse’, and words which convey pictures, ‘either borrowed from *one* outward object to enliven and particularize some *other*; or used allegorically to body forth the inward state of the person speaking; or such as are at least the exponents of his peculiar turn and unusual extent of faculty’.³

¹ *Ibid.*, 259.

² This notebook is still in the possession of the Coleridge family. The extract quoted here is printed in Snyder, *Coleridge on Logic and Learning*, p. 138.

³ *Biog. Lit.*, II, 98.

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There are other hints scattered throughout his criticism which show Coleridge's interest in the stylistic manipulation of words, but obviously he had a profounder conception of the function of language. This conception I find well expressed by a modern philosophical critic, Jean-Paul Sartre:

'For the poet, language is a structure of the external world. The speaker is *in a situation* in language; he is invested with words. They are prolongations of his meanings, his pincers, his antennae, his eyeglasses. He manoeuvres them from within; he feels them as if they were his body; he is surrounded by a verbal body which he is hardly aware of and which extends his action upon the world. The poet is outside of language. He sees words inside out as if he did not share the human condition, and as if he were first meeting the word as a barrier as he comes toward men. Instead of first knowing things by their name, it seems that first he has a silent contact with them, since, turning toward that other species of thing which for him is the word, touching them, testing them, palping them, he discovers in them a slight luminosity of their own and particular affinities with the earth, the sky, the water, and all created things.'¹

¹ From *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* 1947. Trans. by Bernard Frechtman in *Partisan Review*, Nov.-Dec., 1947, p. 570. As for the 'testing' and 'palping' of words, cf. the following passage from the manuscript *Logic*: 'In disciplining the mind one of the first rules should be, to lose no opportunity of tracing words to their origin; one good consequence of which will be, that he will be able to use the *language* of sight without being enslaved by its affections. He will at least secure himself from the delusive notion, that what is not *imageable* is likewise not *conceivable*. To emancipate the mind from the despotism of the eye is the first step towards its emancipation from the influences and intrusions of the senses, sensations and passions generally. Thus most effectively is the power of abstraction to be called forth, strengthened and familiarized, and it is this power of abstraction that chiefly distinguishes the human understanding from that of the higher animals—and in the different degree in which this power is developed, the superiority of man over man chiefly consists.' Cf. Snyder, *op. cit.*, pp. 126-7.

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This is an observation that Schelling, no less than Coleridge, would have found very sympathetic, and perhaps it is to be expected that a modern existentialist should speak the same language as one of the earliest exponents of existentialist philosophy. I realize that it may cause some surprise to hear Coleridge described as an existentialist, but I think it would not be difficult to justify the label. The origins of existentialism are usually traced to Kierkegaard; but a much better case can be made out for Schelling, as Dr Bolman has already pointed out.¹ No doubt Coleridge was here again in debt to Schelling, but there is an actuality and eloquence in his statement of the problem which suggests that he had discovered it for himself. Take, for example, the following passage from *The Friend*:

'Hast thou ever raised thy mind to the consideration of existence, in and by itself, as the mere act of existing? Hast thou ever said to thyself thoughtfully, It is! Heedless in that moment, whether it were a man before thee, or a flower, or a grain of sand,—without reference, in short, to this or that particular mode or form of existence? If thou hast indeed attained to this, thou wilt have felt the presence of a mystery, which must have fixed thy spirit in awe and wonder. The very words,—There is nothing! or,—There was a time, when there was nothing! are self-contradictory. There is that within us which repels the proposition with as full and instantaneous a light, as if it bore evidence against the fact in the right of its own eternity.'

'Not to be, then, is impossible: to be, incomprehensible. If thou has mastered this intuition of absolute existence, thou wilt have learnt likewise, that it was this, and no other, which in the earlier ages seized the nobler minds, the elect among men, with a sort of sacred horror. This it was that first caused them to feel within themselves a something ineffably greater than their own individual nature . . .'²

¹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 8n, 56n, 198n.

² *The Friend*, III, 192.

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I cannot pursue these metaphysical speculations of Coleridge's much further; I must content myself with pointing out that, writing before Kierkegaard was born, Coleridge had already formulated the terms of an existentialist philosophy—the *Angst* or sacred horror of nothingness, the Abyss or 'chasm, which the moral being only . . . can fill up', the life in the idea which 'may be awakened, but cannot be given', the divine impulse, 'that the godlike alone can awaken'.¹

Once again we have come to the frontiers of philosophy, but once again I must affirm that philosophy directed the course and determined the ends of Coleridge's criticism. It had been very tempting—it still is tempting—to assign to art a teleological function. Schelling, in his earlier works, had not hesitated to do this—to make art the copula or connecting link between transcendental being and human consciousness—only in the work of art could man make an objective representation of the nature of the supreme reality. But that, as Coleridge and indeed Schelling himself were quick to perceive, would lead to an identification of the moral and the aesthetic. I personally believe that that identification is still

¹ A further quotation from Essay XI of the third volume of *The Friend* (p. 202) will illustrate in still further detail the existential nature of Coleridge's philosophy: 'The groundwork, therefore, of all pure speculation is the full apprehension of the difference between the contemplation of reason, namely, that intuition of things which arises when we possess ourselves, as one with the whole, which is substantial knowledge, and that which presents itself when, transferring reality to the negations of reality, to the ever varying frame-work of the uniform life, we think of ourselves as separated beings, and place nature in antithesis to the mind, as object to subject, thing to thought, death to life. This is abstract knowledge, or the science of the mere understanding. By the former we know that existence is its own predicate, self-affirmation, the one attribute in which all others are contained, not as parts, but as manifestations. It is an eternal and infinite self-rejoicing, self-loving, with a joy unfathomable, with a love all comprehensive. It is absolute; the absolute is neither singly that which affirms, nor that which is affirmed; but the identity and living *copula* of both.' The further discussion of this aspect of Coleridge's thought is taken up again in the Appendix which follows this essay.

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possible, but for Coleridge, as later for Kierkegaard, there was inherent in the human situation an ineluctable Either/Or. For Coleridge a 'standpoint', or a 'starting-post' as he called it, was a psychological necessity—a knot must be tied in the thread before we can sew, as Kierkegaard expressed it; and Coleridge, at an early age, had made his standpoint the Christian revelation. He had a horror of any kind of self-consistent system—that seemed to him merely a dialectical trick, a mechanical top spinning in nothingness, not touching the human heart. 'The inevitable result of all consequent reasoning', he said, 'in which the reason refuses to acknowledge a higher or deeper ground than it can itself supply, and weens to possess within itself the centre of its own system, is—and from Zeno the Eleatic to Spinoza, and from Spinoza to the Schellings, Okens and their adherents, of the present day, ever has been—pantheism under one or other of its modes, the least repulsive of which differs from the rest, not in its consequences, which are one and the same in all, and in all alike are practically atheistic, but only as it may express the striving of the philosopher himself to hide these consequences from his own mind.'¹

These religious considerations were decisive, but they were linked in Coleridge's mind with aesthetic considerations. He had come to realize, from his investigations into the nature of dramatic poetry, that all dramatic effect was dependent on a tragic sense of life. 'To the idea of life,' he wrote in his essay on 'Poesy or Art', 'victory or strife is necessary; as virtue consists not simply in the absence of vices, but in the overcoming of them. So it is in beauty.'² The wisdom in nature gave unity and perfection—the thought and the product were one; but since there is no reflex act, no element of consciousness of existence, so there could be no moral responsibility. But in man there is reflexion, there is freedom, there is choice. This not only makes man 'the head of visible creation'; it requires

¹ *The Friend*, III, 204.

² *Biog. Lit.*, II, 262-3.

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him to impose upon the images of nature the categories of moral reflexion—to make thought nature, and nature thought.

At this point we must stop, for there Coleridge stopped. He had discovered that ‘existence is its own predicate’; that the dialectic intellect is ‘utterly incapable of communicating insight or conviction concerning the existence or possibility of the world, as different from Deity’. But he did not trace out the consequences of this discovery for his philosophy of art. It was left for Kierkegaard to pronounce the absolute Either/or—*either* the aesthetical *or* the ethical. The final beauty, for Coleridge and Schelling no less than for Kierkegaard, was the beauty of holiness; but it was left to Kierkegaard to point out, eloquently, loquaciously, that beauty in man (as distinct from beauty in the work of art) requires a certain perspective, movement, history; and in such a condition of ‘immanent teleology’, as he called it, we have ‘passed beyond the spheres of nature and of art and are in the sphere of freedom, of the ethical’.¹

Coleridge’s critical activity debouched (I can think of no more appropriate word to describe the physical effect) into this ethical realm, and as we are on this occasion restricted to his aesthetical realm, we must now take leave of him. I have given regrettably little account of the *variety* of Coleridge’s criticism—of the brilliance and range of his perceptiveness. But those are incidental features of his work which must be appreciated extensively—without the intermediation of a secondary critic. I have confined myself to general aspects of Coleridge’s criticism, because only in that way can we realize the greatness of his achievement. He made criticism into a science, and using his own experiences and those of his fellow poets as material for his research, revealed to the world for the first time some part of the mystery of genius and of the universal and eternal significance of art.

¹ Cf. *Either/Or*. Trans. W. Lowrie. Princeton, 1944, II, 229.

NOTE

It may be useful in a brief appendix to trace the subsequent history of that 'poetic monism' which was first suggested by the *Critique of Judgment*, then more firmly outlined by Schelling, and which from the first held many attractions for Coleridge. Coleridge 'thought the *Kritik der Urtheilskraft* the most astonishing of all Kant's works'—an ambiguous remark recorded by H. C. Robinson (*Diary*, 15 Nov. 1810). (Coleridge's alternating attraction and repulsion *vis à vis* any form of pantheism is amusingly illustrated in another entry in Crabb Robinson's *Diary*: '1812, Nov. 3. . . . He walked with me to A. Robinson's for Spinoza wh. I lent him. In the course of a few minutes while standing in the room, Coleridge kissed Spinoza's face at the title page, said his book was his gospel, &c., in less than a minute, added that his philosophy was after all false. . . . Did philosophy commence in an *It is* instead of an *I am*, Spinoza would be altogether true. And without allowing a breathing space he parenthetically asserted: "I however believe in all the doctrines of Christianity, even of the Trinity."') Coleridge's final reaction to Schelling is expressed in a marginal note on the *Briefe über Dogmatismus und Criticismus* (*Biog. Lit.*, 2nd edition, Appendix): 'The more I reflect, the more convinced I am of the gross materialism of the whole system!' But meanwhile Schelling himself had been moving away from his neat, monistic system of antitheses. He had broken with Hegel as early as 1806, and the subsequent development of his thought was largely a reaction away from Hegel's panlogism. Dr Bolman remarks (*op. cit.*, p. 35) that 'it was not until after 1827 that Schelling precisely stated the difference. That difference has to do with Schelling's self-confessed change in attitude toward his own early philosophy of nature; and that change revolves round the concept of God. Of his own philosophy of nature prior to 1804, Schelling had said:

'God was that subject which remains *as* subject, victorious over all, which can no longer fall into the object; just this subject had passed through all nature, through all history, through the succession of *all* moments, from which it appeared only as the final result. This passing through was represented as a real movement (not as a progress in mere thought), represented even as real process. Now I can indeed conceive God as end and mere result of my thought, as he was in ancient metaphysics, but I cannot conceive him as result of an *objective* process.'

Dr Bolman further quotes Schelling as saying 'Real thought is that

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whereby something opposed to thought is overcome. Where one has only thought, and that abstract thought, for content, thought has nothing to overcome.' Schelling had, in effect, isolated for the first time the problem which has remained basic in modern philosophy—the struggle between conceptual necessity and existential freedom. That Coleridge was fully aware of the same problem has been my contention in the foregoing lecture. Coleridge criticized the early Schelling on precisely the same grounds that the later Schelling criticized Hegel—that he tried to make pure thought or logic account for existence; and with such a rationalist conception one could never enter the realm of existence. 'Hegel's formal approach to free creation ended, according to Schelling, in pantheism of the worst kind, in which God has no freedom but enters endlessly into process', (*Bolman, op. cit.*, p. 37)—which is exactly Coleridge's criticism of Schelling.

These later speculations of Schelling's were continued by Kierkegaard and taken up again by Husserl, and are now the preoccupation of Heidegger, Jaspers, Marcel, Sartre and other so-called Existentialists. But in this note I am more concerned with the fate of Schelling's earlier 'nature' philosophy, for it was by no means liquidated by calling it pantheism. It was given a new stimulus by the biological theory of evolution, and both Nietzsche and Spencer are to be reckoned among its renovators. But its most formidable restatement has been due to Bergson, whose ambition it was to unite biology with metaphysics, the theory of life with the theory of knowledge. It seemed to Bergson that a theory of knowledge (such as Kant's or Schelling's) which does not place the intellect in the general evolution of life 'will teach us neither how the frames of knowledge have been constructed nor how we can enlarge or go beyond them. It is necessary that these two enquiries, theory of knowledge and theory of life, should join each other, and, by a circular process, push each other on unceasingly'. (*Creative Evolution*, Eng. trans., 1914, p. xiv.)

Personally I retain a considerable respect for the position reached by Bergson, but a more recent treatment of the whole subject will be found in the *Philosophie der lebendigen Wirklichkeit* by Richard Woltereck. I believe that Professor Woltereck did not live to complete his work, and I have only seen the second volume of the trilogy he planned (*Ontologie des Lebendigen*, Stuttgart, Enke Verlag, 1940). It is not a work that I can read with any ease or understand with any certainty; but I can perhaps indicate its bearing on the problems which agitated Coleridge and still agitate all thinking men. Naturally the ontology of a practical biologist like Woltereck cannot accommodate the irrational notion that 'all true reality has both its ground and its evidence in the will, without which its complement science itself is but an elaborate game of

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shadows' (*The Friend*, III, 210). It is not quite clear what Coleridge meant by the 'will' in this context, but he would certainly have regarded it as manifested only in human consciousness; whereas Woltereck assumes that will is inseparable from the life-process, which, ever since its origin, has been 'thrown back on its own resources, its own potencies, specific determinants (ideas), intentions and inner impulses, all of them subjective powers which are the immanent possession of concrete life-carriers'. This is not just the materialism of a scientist opposed to all idealistic philosophies. Nor is it the familiar doctrine of vitalism, nor any kind of 'pan-psychism'. The 'genetic monism' of a single, progressive differentiation and intensification of life is contrasted with the pluralism of 'radically' different realities implicit in the idea of somatic, psychic and spiritual life forces. This new ontology tries to analyse the phenomenal characteristics of physical and, more particularly, living reality together with the objective, elementary characteristics lying behind them, and then to understand all these characteristics synthetically, as a whole. It insists that reality is one progressive flow of events, from which not only consciousness, but organic life itself has been disengaged or particularized—'life is a jump-like intensification of not-life, dying is a jump-like relapse into this prior form of reality'. Attention is focused on '*the continuous fact of anamorphosis*', the single total process leading upwards from the elementary physical states of cosmic nebulae to a-biotic differentiation, then to simple and increasingly differentiated life, and finally to spiritual events, spiritual creativity and spiritual freedom.'

Woltereck at this point opposes his view to Heidegger's. He admits that knowledge of existence implies certain 'resonances', and that one of these is the 'dread' arising from the consciousness of Nothing and the feeling of shipwreck that Heidegger has placed in the centre of his teaching. But there is an equally valid and biologically more positive 'resonance' which was first described by Aristotle—the amazement and wonder of the man awaking to contemplation and discovery, which is bound up with the inner urge to knowledge, in its turn a deepened and intensified form of 'curiosity'. This more positive 'resonance' has associated with it a *joyfulness* and inner *impulse* to assimilate, examine, understand, create. The sciences as well as the arts are born of this impulse. All the high and genuine values which are expressed in art, or in love, or in the perception of truth, have their origin in this same impulse.

Nobody, Woltereck admits, can say which of these 'resonances' has the more significance for mankind as a whole: *the approach to transcendence* following on the feeling of shipwreck, or *the inward intensification* through some profound experience that transcends the ordinary sphere of self, an intensification coming from feelings directly contrary to

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'dread' and 'shipwreck'. This heightened sense of vitality in a man so gripped forms the *polar opposite* of the fundamental feeling described by Jaspers and Heidegger.

We can now return to Schelling and Coleridge and see that they were aware of both these resonances. There is plenty of Aristotelian wonderment in Schelling—the Schelling who said that 'the best course of a life devoted to philosophy might be to begin with Plato and end with Aristotle' (*Samt. Werke*, II, I, 380; quoted by Bolman, p. 39). As for Coleridge, his enthusiasm for teleology is very evident in a passage like the following:

In all inferior things from the grass on the house top to the giant tree of the forest; from the gnats that swarm in its shade, and the mole that burrows amid its roots to the eagle which builds in its summit, and the elephant which browses on its branches, we behold—first, a subjection to universal laws by which each thing belongs to the whole, as interpenetrated by the powers of the whole; and secondly, the intervention of particular laws by which the universal laws are suspended or tempered for weal and sustenance of each particular class. Hence and thus we see too that each species, and each individual of every species, becomes a system, a world of its own. If then we behold this economy everywhere in the irrational creation, shall we not hold it probable that by some analogous intervention a similar temperament will have been effected for the rational and moral? Are we not entitled to expect some appropriate agency in behalf of the presiding and alone progressive creature? To presume some special provision for the permanent interest of the creature destined to move and grow towards that divine humanity we have learnt to contemplate as the final cause of all creation, and as the centre in which all its lines converge?' (*The Friend*, III, 197–8).

There are further Coleridge's remarks in the essay 'On Poesy or Art' on the essential interdependence of form and life: his express belief that living or life-producing ideas 'are essentially one with the germinal causes in nature'. There is again his statement that 'the rules of the Imagination are themselves the very powers of growth and production'. (*Biog. Lit.*, II, 65.)

The importance of Woltereck's ontology is that it *reconciles* the rules of the imagination and the powers of growth which Schelling, and Coleridge too in the end, felt to involve a contradiction, and which Kierkegaard presented as an inescapable dilemma. 'The scientist', writes Woltereck, 'who resolves to write or even to read an ontology is little inclined, but nevertheless compelled, to recognize a fact which he is wont to leave to psychology and philosophy and not acknowledge as belonging to his province. This is the fact that non-spatial *inner* data, or experiences of the *INSIDE* are just as important for knowledge as the

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'external' or material-extensive objects of our observation by means of sense-organs and instruments. The ontology of INSIDE events investigates and evaluates the 'categorical' experiences or internal events that are not reducible to other facts; we found such to be, for instance, *resonance* (in the form of dread, fear, amazement, rapture), and we can also cite the impulsion of the will to self-expression, furthermore let us say curiosity, the need of pleasure and value, the feeling of freedom . . . and various other internal facts the discussion of which we leave to the psychologist.'

The resonance that impels us to self-expression and to what Woltereck elsewhere calls the highest capacity of all, *self-intensification*, certainly leads to the creation of both aesthetic and ethical values, and these are given the highest place in the telological process. Woltereck's consideration of the many problems involved is much more complete and much more complex than this note would suggest, but in my opinion his scientific approach to the fundamental problems of metaphysics has brought us in sight of that reconciliation of science and metaphysics which was one of Coleridge's, as it was one of Bergson's, dearest desires.

I should not conclude this note without acknowledging the help I have received from Mr R. F. C. Hull, who has not only communicated his enthusiasm for Woltereck's work to me, but also put at my disposal some pages of translation that he had made for his own use.

ESSAY II

Wordsworth's Philosophical Faith

The celebration of centenaries is a growing fashion, and in general it may be welcomed. For a day, or a few days, or even for a whole year, it concentrates public attention on some great figure of the past, and it may even induce a few of us to take down, from dusty shelves labelled 'Classics', the works of a master like Goethe or Wordsworth. We deceive ourselves if we imagine that such works are constantly read by any considerable number of people: Reading—leisurely, absorbed, and curious—is rapidly ceasing to exist as a characteristic activity of modern man. We read because we must—to get a degree or to be able to chatter about the latest novelty; we rarely read to communicate with some great mind, to share some genial vision. Reading, like walking, is one of the lost arts; one of the sacrifices we have made to speed, noise, and news.

To see how different it was in Wordsworth's day we have only to read Dorothy's *Journals*. 'We spent the morning in the orchard—read the *Prothalamium* of Spenser; walked backwards and forwards.' Or: 'We had a nice walk, and afterwards sat by a nice snug fire, and William read Spenser, and I read *As You Like It*.' Another day: 'After tea I read aloud the eleventh book of *Paradise Lost*. We were much impressed, and also melted into tears.' There are many entries of that kind, proving that to these people the reading of the classics was a normal activity, indulged in without pride, without effort, by the fireside or in the orchard, at any time of day, in any season. *And they cooked, and washed up, and brought up*

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families. Here is the epitome of their life: 'I went and sate with W[illiam] and walked backwards and forwards in the orchard till dinner time. He read me his poem. I broiled beef-steaks. After dinner we made a pillow of my shoulder—I read to him and my Beloved slept.'

It may be said that poems written in such an aura of contentment were not destined for an age of crisis such as ours. To this we must answer, in the first place, that every age is, to itself, an age of crisis; and in 1801 or 2 minds were just as agitated by threats of war and dangers of revolution as they are today. In the second place, if consolation is to be found in poetry, it is surely in an age of crisis that we should seek it. These are the obvious answers; but more emphatically we must affirm that poetry at all times is to be enjoyed for its own sake, and is no less ambiguously recommended as a specific for troubled souls than whisky as a cure for the common cold. It was perhaps John Stuart Mill who was responsible for the prophylactic approach to poetry; his tribute to Wordsworth's poems¹ is rightly famous, and often quoted; but it is not often observed that it is equivocal. For though he begins by describing them as 'the very culture of the feelings', 'a source of inward joy, of sympathetic and imaginative pleasure, which could be shared in by all human beings; which had no connexion with struggle or imperfection' he could not help reflecting that they 'would be made richer by every improvement in the physical or social condition of mankind'. This was no doubt a concession to Mr Roebuck, with whom, he says, he was in the habit of comparing notes on such subjects. John Arthur Roebuck, a Benthamite who sat in the House of Commons for nearly half a century, was, says Mill, a man 'whose instincts were those of action and struggle', and he had consequently 'a strong relish and great admiration of Byron, whose writings he regarded as the poetry of human life, while

¹ It is to be found in Chapter V of his *Autobiography*.

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Wordsworth's, according to him, was that of flowers and butterflies'. Like most Englishmen who have feelings, says Mill, Roebuck found his feelings stand very much in his way. Feelings, felt Roebuck, could be damned unpleasant, and 'looking for his happiness elsewhere, he wished that his feelings should be deadened rather than quickened.'

I must apologize for planting this radical Roebuck in this Wordsworthian retrospect, but Mill was quite right in recognizing in him the anti-Wordsworthian. By this we do not mean the Philistine indifferent to all the arts. On the contrary, Mill tells us that Roebuck 'took great pleasure in music, in dramatic performances, especially in painting, and himself drew and designed landscapes with great facility and beauty. But he never could be made to see that these things have any value as aids in the formation of character.' In this he was typically English, for, says Mill, 'the English character, and English social circumstances, make it so seldom possible to derive happiness from the exercise of the sympathies. . . . In most other countries the paramount importance of the sympathies as a constituent of individual happiness is an axiom, taken for granted rather than needing any formal statement; but most English thinkers almost seem to regard them as necessary evils, required for keeping men's actions benevolent and compassionate. Roebuck was, or appeared to be, this kind of Englishman.'

Wordsworth, Mill thought, was precisely the poet for such Englishmen. He called him 'the poet of unpoetical natures, possessed of quiet and contemplative tastes'. And to Mill's logical mind it seemed that 'unpoetical natures are precisely those which require poetic cultivation. This cultivation Wordsworth is much more fitted to give, than poets who are intrinsically far more poets than he.'

We can admit that there exists a broad distinction between the poetry of contemplation or meditation and the poetry of

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action—to use our contemporary jargon, it is the difference between the poetry of introverts and the poetry of extraverts. But it is not, as Roebuck evidently thought, the difference between the poetry of butterflies and the poetry of human life. At least, if we are to make a distinction in such crude terms, then Wordsworth is very definitely a poet of human life. The butterfly and the lesser celandine are but lowly features in his poetic landscape.

I do not, on this occasion, propose to revive the discussion of 'pure poetry'. Personally I have always been on the side of the purists, in admitting that poetic purity does exist, absolute and uncontaminated by any desire to convey exact information, improve the reader's mind, or fit into 'the Englishman's scheme of life'. And Wordsworth was capable of such pure poetry. At least, the term is much too restricted, and would admit a very modest volume of English poetry, could it not include a poem like 'The Green Linnet' or 'To a Butterfly'. A poem like 'Louisa' is as pure as any poem of Herrick's, especially in its original version:

*I met Louisa in the shade;
And, having seen that lovely Maid,
Why should I fear to say
That she is ruddy, fleet, and strong;
And down the rocks can leap along,
Like rivulets in May?

And she hath smiles to earth unknown,
Smiles, that with motion of their own
Do spread, and sink, and rise;
That come and go with endless play,
And ever, as they pass away,
Are hidden in her eyes.

She loves her fire, her Cottage-home;
Yet o'er the moorland will she roam*

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*In weather rough and bleak;
And when against the wind she strains,
Oh, might I kiss the mountain rains
That sparkle on her cheek.*

*Take all that's mine 'beneath the moon',
If I with her but half a noon
May sit beneath the walls
Of some old cave, or mossy nook,
When up she winds along the brook,
To hunt the waterfalls.*

'Beneath the moon' is, of course, a literary phrase: it comes from *King Lear* and Wordsworth puts it between quotation marks. But there are literary allusions, if not phrases, in Herrick who is the ideally pure poet, and they have never been regarded as a reflection on his purity. It must be admitted, however, that 'Louisa' is an exception in this respect (and not even an exception if we are to regard the poem as a description of a morally approved type of womanhood, rather than as a tribute to feminine charm). Even in such an objective poem as 'The Green Linnet', there are phrases which no 'pure' poet would venture on—phrases like 'presiding Spirit', 'a Presence like the air'; and in the final stanza there is a metaphysical idea which gave Wordsworth a good deal of trouble, judging from the way he tinkered with it.

*While thus before my eyes he gleams,
A brother of the Leaves he seems;
When in a moment forth he teems
His little song in gushes:
As if it pleas'd him to disdain
And mock the Form which he did feign,
While he was dancing with the train
Of Leaves among the bushes.* (1802)

I may be reading more into the lines than Wordsworth in-

tended, but there seems to be a distinction here between form and expression which is intensely subjective, if not philosophic, and would never arise in the uncritical mind of a 'pure' poet.

I am not trying to make out a case for the 'purity' of Wordsworth's poetry. Far from it: I want it to be recognized that Wordsworth's characteristic poetry is almost the antithesis of pure poetry, and yet poetry none the less; perhaps poetry all the more. We must recognize that Wordsworth was wholly committed, both in theory and in practice, to what Mill calls 'the cultivation of the feelings'. What is more necessary to demonstrate is that such poetry, altogether apart from its meliorative influence on Mr Roebuck and 'that kind of Englishman', has objective aesthetic values. It is poetry, and requires no sociological justification.

There are, presumably, two tests of poetic worth: the historical test, which is the test of time, the persistence of an active public esteem; and the aesthetic test, which is very difficult of application, as I shall explain presently. Not that the historical test is altogether easy, but the process of sifting and selection which ends by certain poets being reprinted from generation to generation, included in libraries of classical authors which must presumably be sold to the public, does mean that something in the nature of a demand for the work of such poets does continue to exist. We must not accept this evidence at its face value: there used to be a convention which required every gentleman's library to be furnished with the appropriate 'sets', though some of them might be dummies to cover a closet door or a wine cupboard. The same convention persists in our bourgeois civilization, with bindings of cloth instead of leather and a cocktail cabinet which it may no longer be creditable to disguise. That crude test Wordsworth passes as well as any English poet. It is a test that eliminates the Macphersons and Rogerses and other

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familiars of the *Zeitgeist*; but beyond a certain point it does not discriminate. Certain poets continue to float on lifebuoys of academic inflation; others sink before they are recognized, to be recovered years later, perhaps, by some curious diver. Shakespeare himself has passed through the doldrums, and Donne and Blake, so secure in present estimation, were once rescued from oblivion. Wordsworth has not suffered from such inconstancy of fame. A hundred years ago he died, a laureate and a sage, honoured by court and academies. The quality of Wordsworth's fame has changed, but not, I think, his status. If for a time his pre-eminence was challenged by Tennyson, or Browning, or Swinburne, or Hardy, it was not for long. They, too, are classics, more or less secure in their niches; but they still abide our questioning while Wordsworth is free. It is a question of the *Zeitgeist* again—Tennyson its victim, Browning its high priest, Swinburne its recalcitrant slave, and Hardy its accomplice. Wordsworth was in some sense independent, unconstrained; and therein lies his greatness. We must try to define this unique freedom of spirit if we are to understand his true stature.

In the end I shall claim that his freedom of spirit is essentially a quality of the poetic spirit; but I think we can best approach it by considering its moral and metaphysical aspects. That Wordsworth was very conscious of the moral element in poetry is vividly illustrated by the attitude he adopted to that other great poet the bicentenary of whose birth we were celebrating last year—Goethe. 'Of Goethe,' notes Crabb Robinson in his diary for January 1, 1843, 'Wordsworth spoke with his usual bitterness, and I cannot deny that his objection is well founded: that is, an extreme defect of religious sentiment—perhaps I should say, moral sense; and this suffices, says Wordsworth, to prove that he could be only a second-rate man.' Wordsworth apparently read Goethe's poetry only in translation but this did not deter him from the

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expression of most dogmatic condemnation of both its form and substance. 'There is a profligacy, an inhuman sensuality, in his works which is utterly revolting,' he told his nephew, the Bishop. 'I am not intimately acquainted with them generally,' he added, 'but I take my ground on the first canto of *Wilhelm Meister*; and as the attorney-general of human nature, I there indict him for wantonly outraging the sympathies of humanity. . . . Man is essentially a moral agent, and there is that immortal and inextinguishable yearning for something pure and spiritual which will plead against these poetical sensualists as long as man remains what he is.' That judgment was recorded in 1827; fourteen years later, in some remarks made to Lady Richardson, he was less violent and more reasonable. Goethe, he then said,

'does not seem to me to be a great poet in either of the classes of poets. At the head of the first class I would place Homer and Shakespeare, whose universal minds are able to reach every variety of thought and feeling without bringing their own individuality before the reader. They infuse, they breathe life into every object they approach, but you never find *themselves*. At the head of the second class, those whom you can trace individually in all they write, I would place Spenser and Milton. In all that Spenser writes you can trace the gentle affectionate spirit of the man; in all that Milton writes you find the exalted sustained being that he was. Now in what Goethe writes, who aims to be of the first class, the *universal*, you find the man himself, the artificial man, where he should not be found; so that I consider him to be a very artificial writer, aiming to be universal, and yet constantly exposing his individuality, which his character was not of a kind to dignify. He had not sufficiently clear moral perceptions to make him anything but an artificial writer.'

This, let us admit, is formidable criticism. Whatever its

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relevance to Goethe—and I fancy that it is substantially the criticism still proffered by our contemporary, Mr T. S. Eliot—whatever its relevance to Goethe, there is no doubt of its application, inversely, to Wordsworth himself. Presumably one who had written an epical account of the growth of his own mind would put himself in the second class of poets, with Spenser and Milton; and there certainly he belongs. And of such poets he demands 'clear moral perceptions'. What, we must now ask, is the validity of such a demand in poetic criticism?

We must proceed warily at this point, for what I regard as one of the major critical fallacies is committed in the name of morality. Note, however, that in the first place Wordsworth speaks of moral perceptions, and not of moral judgments. It is an important distinction, for whereas moral perception is essential to an aesthetic representation of the world that embraces human values, moral judgment is foreign to the aesthetic attitude. It interferes with the natural operation of aesthetic faculties and destroys the whole basis of appreciation in the arts. This is very understandable if we bear in mind that a fundamental component of the aesthetic attitude is sympathy, or—more accurately—empathy. In the presence of any work of art, whether it be a statue, a painting, a drama, or a poem, the recipient must abdicate for the moment—must surrender his independent and outstanding personality, to identify himself with the form or action presented by the artist. Only in that way do we penetrate to the heart of the mystery that is a work of art.

In criticism it is different. It is still necessary, of course, to undergo the aesthetic experience, though many critics, I fear, dispense with it. They judge works of art as they judge sides of bacon; assess them like bills of lading or balance sheets. Criticism, it seems to me, should always be *post facto*, and the *factum*, the deed or act, is the sensible experience of a work of

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art. On the basis of that experience we can then do several things—we can describe the experience, which in itself is a form of criticism, and a legitimate one; or we can estimate the value of the experience, which is criticism of another kind. In this latter kind of criticism, an estimate of the *moral* value of the experience may be quite legitimate, but I do not think we should claim that it is essential. What is essential, a prerequisite of any form of criticism, whether of works of art or wine or women, is some proof of the presence of *aesthetic* values.

But to return to the moral perceptions of the poet. That the moral element in Shakespeare is perceptual rather than judicial was beautifully demonstrated by A. C. Bradley in his famous lectures on Shakespearean Tragedy. That a moral order, a sense of the difference between good and evil is everywhere present in Shakespeare's work—that is admitted. But there is no moral judgment—not even a poetic justice. Bradley points out that

'we might not object to the statement that Lear deserved to suffer for his folly, selfishness and tyranny; but to assert that he deserved to suffer what he did suffer is to do violence, not merely to language but to any healthy moral sense. It is, moreover, to obscure the tragic fact that the consequences of action cannot be limited to that which would appear to us to follow 'justly' from them. And, this being so, when we call the order of the tragic world just, we are either using the word in some vague and unexplained sense, or we are going beyond what is shown us of this order, and are appealing to faith.'

And Bradley sums up the matter thus:

'The ideas of justice and desert are, it seems to me, in *all* cases—even those of Richard III and of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth—untrue to our imaginative experience. When we are immersed in a tragedy, we feel towards dispositions,

actions, and persons such emotions as attraction and repulsion, pity, wonder, fear, horror, perhaps hatred; but we do not judge . . . tragedy does not belong, any more than religion belongs, to the sphere of these notions; neither does the imaginative attitude in presence of it . . . the use of such language in attempts to render our imaginative experience in terms of the understanding is, to say the least, full of danger.'

I know that this notion of the artist's sympathetic penetration of, and identification with, the tragic world of good and evil is difficult to grasp, especially for natures like Dr Johnson's that are naturally pontifical. But it is essential to a proper appreciation of poetry which never, even in Milton, succeeds in justifying the ways of God to man, but always exhibits life as a mystery. The aim of art is to reconcile us to the contradictions of life; not to resolve those contradictions.

From this point of view Wordsworth was less than just to Goethe. I do not see how one can say that the author of *Faust* was deficient in moral perceptions. I think there is more substance in the other phrase used by Crabb Robinson—an extreme defect in religious sentiment—a subject I shall come to presently. But to dispose first of Wordsworth's attitude to Goethe: I suspect that his real antipathy was personal, and is betrayed in the use of such words as 'profligacy', 'inhuman sensuality', 'poetical sensualist'—a phrase he was ready to apply to Byron too ('reprehensible, perverted, and vicious')—were the actual words he used—cf. R. P. Gillies, *Memoirs of a Literary Veteran*, III, 144). I have said sufficient about Wordsworth's personality on another occasion; I need only recall now that he himself had not been guiltless of conduct which he felt to be both profligate and sensual, and his bitter judgment of Goethe and Byron has in it an element of personal remorse. We know that the repentant sinner is apt to be a harsh judge of other people's faults.

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If we now ask how Wordsworth exhibited his moral perceptions in his poetry, the answer is not difficult to give. The Advertisement prefixed to *Lyrical Ballads* already spoke of 'painting manners and passions'. It must be confessed that he began with effects of crude poetic justice such as the True Story of 'Goody Blake and Harry Gill'; but the majority of these early poems—such poems as 'The Idiot Boy', 'The Thorn', 'We are Seven'—are 'objective' to a pointless degree, and have often on that account been the subject of parody. It is worth recalling Wordsworth's own statement of his intention in such poems in the Preface of 1800:

'I have said that each of these poems has a purpose. I have also informed my Reader what this purpose will be found principally to be: namely, to illustrate the manner in which our feelings and ideas are associated in a state of excitement. But speaking in less general language, it is to follow the fluxes and refluxes of the mind when agitated by the great and simple affections of our nature. This object I have endeavoured in these short essays to attain by various means; by tracing the maternal passion through many of its more subtle windings, as in the poems of the IDIOT BOY and the MAD MOTHER; by accompanying the last struggles of a human being at the approach of death, cleaving in solitude to life and society, as in the poem of the FORSAKEN INDIAN; by showing, as in the stanzas entitled WE ARE SEVEN, the perplexity and obscurity which in childhood attend our notion of death, or rather our utter inability to admit that notion; or by displaying the strength of fraternal, or to speak more philosophically, of moral attachment when early associated with the great and beautiful objects of nature, as in THE BROTHERS; or as in the incident of SIMON LEE, by placing my Reader in the way of receiving from ordinary moral sensations another and more salutary impression than we are accustomed to receive from

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them . . . it is proper that I should mention one other circumstance which distinguishes these Poems from the popular Poetry of the day; it is this, that the feeling therein developed gives importance to the action and situation and not the action and situation to the feeling.'

This is the language, not of moral judgment, but of the associationist psychology of David Hartley: it was, at the time, the latest and most positivistic scientific attitude a poet could adopt. It is no exaggeration to say that the poetic practice and aspiration of Wordsworth at the age of thirty can only be understood against the background of Hartley's *Observations on Man*,¹ and when Wordsworth in the Preface of 1802 speaks of poetry as 'the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge . . . the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all science', he was thinking of poetry in relation to the science of Hartley.

Wordsworth's indebtedness to Hartley has been demonstrated by Professor Beatty and others, and it is only necessary to remind the reader that it was profound. The famous definition of poetry as emotion recollected in tranquillity . . . contemplated till by *a species of reaction* the tranquillity gradually disappears, etc., is pure Hartleian psychology, and we find the word 'association' repeated in the early prefaces with a frequency which becomes understandable only when we refer it back to its Hartleian context. Even the reader, we are told, must be 'in a healthful state of association' if he is to be 'in some degree enlightened, his taste exalted, and his affections ameliorated' by a poem. One begins to see that a phrase like 'the culture of the feelings' had a very precise meaning for Wordsworth. In Hartley's psychology the mind is a *mechanism* (he himself made great use of the word) which requires for its efficiency a diversity of impressions producing vibrations in

¹ *Observations on Man: his Frame, his Duty, and his Expectations*. First printed in 1749. My quotation is from the fourth edition, 3 vols. London, 1801.

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the muscles and involuntary associations, by which means all human ideas are generated. This mental gear-box must be kept well oiled and exercised if it is to function properly, and the arts and sciences are to be admitted and admired chiefly for their contribution to a healthful state of association.

Hartley was superseded as time went on, but he is present in the background of Wordsworth's thought right up to the completion of the first version of the *Prelude* in 1805; that is to say, his psychology dominates the Wordsworth of the great and poetically decisive period. It is an important fact because there is no doubt that Hartley was, in a practical sense, a liberating influence. The theory of association, though it may not account for all Hartley claimed for it, remains valid for a good deal of the mind's operations. It has of course been revived and considerably amplified by the modern school of psychoanalysis; and as a key to the mysteries of poetic inspiration it has been used effectively, not only by academic critics like Professor Livingston Lowes, but also by the French surrealists.¹ Association and new impressions, in Hartley's psychology, could account for every mental phenomenon; and so, up to 1802 at any rate, thought Wordsworth. But by 1805 a new power was claiming recognition—the imagination. The imagination plays no part in the psychology of the early Prefaces—all is passions and volitions, habit and impulse. And the imagination played no part in Hartley's psychology—it is dismissed in a paragraph (*Observations*, sect. V, Prop. XCI, 'Of Imagination, Reveries, and Dreams') and like everything else is satisfactorily accounted for by the principle of association (dreams give Hartley a little more trouble, but he came to the conclusion that their 'wildness' is of singular use to us, for if we were always awake our associations 'would be so much cemented by continuance, as that nothing could afterwards disjoin them; which would be madness').

It is true that Wordsworth's Preface of 1800 does recognize

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'a principle which must be well known to those who have made any of the Arts an object of accurate reflection; I mean the pleasure which the mind derives from the perception of similitude in dissimilitude'. This is Coleridge's famous esemplastic power, the power to unify *and* so to create. Again, let us forbear from any further discussion of the psychological truth or critical aptness of this definition of the imagination; it is sufficient for our present purposes to note that Wordsworth accepted it, and between 1802 and 1805 he had extended it and deepened it until it became the sanction of his work and philosophy, the very faculty of creation and of spiritual vision.

As Wordsworth's imagination played upon the dry bones of Hartley's mechanistic psychology, he began first to elevate the senses, and then to retreat from the despotic power he thereby brought into evidence. The process is illustrated in an interesting fragment of 1798–9 published for the first time in the fifth volume of the new Oxford edition of the *Poetical Works* (vol. V, p. 343):

*There is creation in the eye,
Nor less in all the other senses; powers
They are that colour, model, and combine
The things perceived with such an absolute
Essential energy that we may say
That those most godlike faculties of ours
At one and the same moment are the mind
And the mind's minister. In many a walk
At evening or by moonlight, or reclined
At midday upon beds of forest moss
Have we to Nature and her impulses
Of our whole being made free gift, and when
Our trance has left us, oft have we, by aid
Of the impressions which it left behind,
Looked inward on ourselves, and learned, perhaps,*

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*Something of what we are. Nor in those hours
Did we destroy....
The original impression of delight,
But by such retrospect it was recalled
To yet a second and a second life.
While in this excitation of the mind
A vivid pulse of sentiment and thought
Beat palpably within us, and all shades
Of consciousness were ours.*

The idea, which also occurs in an early version of the *Ode: Intimations of Immortality*, is that we dwell in a frame of senses, Hartley's 'motory vibratiuncles', and that we only throw off this frame of necessity, mitigate its spell, by some supersensory power which Wordsworth began to call the imagination, a power not granted to every mortal, but only characteristic of 'higher minds'. In 1799 Wordsworth was still basing the whole structure of consciousness on sensible impressions, but by 1805 he was invoking more mysterious forces. There is a famous passage in Book VI of the *Prelude*, where he relates how his imagination awoke, how he became conscious of the glory of his soul, at the moment he crossed the Alps. But I would like now to draw attention to a more explicit passage in the last Book of *The Prelude*. It requires close attention, for it is crucial for any understanding of Wordsworth's mature philosophy. I will quote from the 1850 version, which is at this point poetically finer, but will glance from time to time at the 1805 text where it seems that later caution has dictated some amendment of the original sense. It will be remembered that this Book begins dramatically, with the poet leaving 'Bethgelert's huts at couching-time', 'to see the sun rise from the top of Snowdon'. He describes how he panted up the slope 'with eager pace and no less eager thoughts', and how suddenly

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a light upon the turf

Fell like a flash, and lo! as I looked up,
• *The Moon hung naked in a firmament*
Of azure without cloud, and at my feet
Rested a silent sea of hoary mist.
A hundred hills their dusky backs upheaved
All over this still ocean; and beyond,
Far, far beyond, the solid vapours stretched,
In headlands, tongues, and promontory shapes,
Into the main Atlantic, that appeared
To dwindle, and give up his majesty,
Usurped upon far as the sight could reach.
Not so the ethereal vault; encroachment none
Was there, nor loss; only the inferior stars
Had disappeared, or shed a fainter light
In the clear presence of the full-orbed Moon,
Who, from her sovereign elevation, gazed
Upon the billowy ocean as it lay
All meek and silent, save that through a rift—
Not distant from the shore whereon we stood,
• *A fixed, abyssmal, gloomy, breathing-place—*
Mounted the roar of waters, torrents, streams
Innumerable, roaring with one voice!
Heard over earth and sea, and, in that hour,
For so it seemed, felt by the starry heavens.

That was Wordsworth's charismatic vision, his light from heaven. When that vision had partially dissolved into air, the scene seemed to him to be

The perfect image of a mighty Mind,
Of one that feeds upon infinity,
That is exalted by an underpresence,
The sense of God, or whatsoever is dim
Or vast in its own being.

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That is the 1805 version; in 1850 the image is, it is interesting to observe, more abstract:

the type

*Of a majestic intellect, its acts
And its possessions, what it has and craves,
What in itself it is, and would become.
There I beheld the emblem of a mind
That feeds upon infinity, that broods
Over the dark abyss, intent to hear
Its voices issuing forth to silent light
In one continuous stream; a mind sustained
By recognitions of transcendent power,
In sense conducting to ideal form,
In soul of more than mortal privilege.
One function, above all, of such a mind
Had Nature shadowed there, by putting forth,
'Mid circumstances awful and sublime,
That mutual domination which she loves
To exert upon the face of outward things,
So moulded, joined, abstracted, so endowed
With interchangeable supremacy,
That men, least sensitive, see, hear, perceive,
And cannot choose but feel. The power, which all
Acknowledge when thus moved, which Nature thus
To bodily sense exhibits, is the express
Resemblance of that glorious faculty
That higher minds bear with them as their own.
This is the very spirit in which they deal
With the whole compass of the universe:
They from their native selves can send abroad
Kindred mutations; for themselves create
A like existence; and, whene'er it dawns
Created for them, catch it, or are caught
By its inevitable mastery,*

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*Like angels stopped upon the wing by sound
Of harmony from Heaven's remotest spheres.
Then the enduring and the transient both
Serve to exalt; they build up greatest things
From least suggestions; ever on the watch,
Willing to work and to be wrought upon,
They need not extraordinary calls
To rouse them; in a world of life they live,
By sensible impressions not enthralled,
And by their quickening impulse made more prompt
To hold fit converse with the spiritual world,
And with the generations of mankind
Spread over time, past, present, and to come,
Age after age, till Time shall be no more....*

I break off at that convenient point, though this impassioned thought goes on for another 120 lines, the whole passage being clearly intended as a final epitome of Wordsworth's philosophical faith.

I use this term, *philosophical faith*, in its technical sense, to distinguish the ideas expressed by Wordsworth from *revealed faith*, or religion. It is well known that Coleridge at one time described Wordsworth as a 'semi-atheist' (letter to Thelwall, May 13, 1796). This was before Wordsworth had formulated the ideas I have just quoted, but there has always persisted a suspicion that Wordsworth, inspite of his ecclesiastical relatives and the *Ecclesiastical Sonnets*, was not a sound Christian. If philosophical faith is to be opposed to religious faith in an exclusive sense, then Wordsworth must be put beyond the outer pale, among the atheists and nihilists. But as one of our most distinguished contemporary philosophers has recently remarked, 'these facile alternatives of revealed faith or nihilism, of total science or illusion, serve as weapons of spiritual intimidation; they rob people of their god-given responsi-

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bility and make them subservient. They rend human possibilities into antinomies, and authentic humanity is forgotten.¹

From the same contemporary philosopher, Karl Jaspers, I would like to take a definition of philosophical faith. What Jaspers has compressed into six pregnant lectures I cannot further compress into half-a-dozen sentences, but let me pick out a few significant pointers. In the first place, faith is a different thing from knowledge. It must not on that account be taken to mean a belief in the irrational. 'This polarity of rational and irrational has only led to confusion.' 'The irrational is at bottom mere negation; our faith cannot be a plunge into the darkness of anti-reason and chaos.' Philosophical faith is allied with knowledge—it wants to know what is knowable, and to be conscious of its own premises. 'There must be nothing that is not questioned, no secret that is withheld from enquiry, nothing that is permitted to veil itself.' Philosophical faith should strive to become 'increasingly clearer and more conscious, and by becoming conscious unfold more and more of its inner meaning.'

The difficulty of defining such faith lies in the fact that it comprehends both subject and object. Being, the totality of existence, is neither the object that confronts us, whether we perceive it or think it, nor is it the subject. It is the same with faith: it can be conceived only in conjunction with that which is neither subject nor object but both in one. 'We call the being that is neither only subject nor only object, that is rather on both sides of the subject-object split, *das Umgreifende*, the Comprehensive.' Philosophical faith is a belief in, an experience of, the Comprehensive. The fact that it is *immediate*, that it must be experienced, limits it to particular minds. But this is exactly what Wordsworth was describing in one passage of the lines I have quoted—a power which Nature may exhibit to bodily sense, and which is the express resemblance of that

¹ *The Perennial Scope of Philosophy*. London, 1950, p. 2.

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faculty which philosophical minds bear with them as their own—and this, says Wordsworth,

*is the very spirit in which they deal
With the whole compass of the Universe.*

And the rest of the passage is a minute description of the immediacy of the experience of philosophical faith.

Faith, then, is ‘life out of the Comprehensive, it is guidance and fulfilment through the Comprehensive’, and to speak of it requires the basic philosophical operation, which Jaspers defines as ‘breaking through the prison of our being that appears to us as split into subject and object, even though we can never really enter into the sphere outside it’.

‘There is something in us that resists this basic operation and thus resists philosophical thought itself. We strive always for something tangible. Hence we erroneously take philosophical ideas for object knowledge. As a cat falls on its four paws, we fall upon the tangible object. We fight against the vertigo of philosophy, against the intimation that we should stand on our heads. We wish to remain “sane”, holding on to objects and evading the rebirth of our nature in the act of transcending.’

How reminiscent, again, of Wordsworth’s experience—I am thinking of those occasions when he had to grasp the wall in front of him to arouse himself out of a state of entrancement produced by his sensible impressions. ‘The phenomenality of the empirical world’, observes Jaspers, ‘is a basic insight of philosophic thought. This insight is not empirical; it can be attained only by an act of transcendence.’ And he gives, as one of the conditions of philosophical faith, the capacity to experience the world as the language of God: ‘the world has no independent existence; in it is manifested the speech of God, a speech that has always many meanings and that can

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become historically unequivocal for existence only in the evanescent moment.'

In the preceding essay I tried to make out a case for regarding Coleridge as an early existentialist. The considerable identity which exists between Wordsworth's philosophical faith and that of Karl Jaspers now compels me to make a similar claim for Wordsworth. The identity is far more extensive than I can demonstrate here, but it is not so astonishing if we remember that the common source of all these varieties of existentialism is undoubtedly Kant, a source to which Wordsworth could have had access only through the intermediaries of Schelling and Coleridge. But Wordsworth was a philosophical poet, and not a poetical philosopher. This implies that his faith was based on intuitions rather than on processes of reasoning. No doubt he received some guidance from Coleridge: Coleridge may have defined for him the philosophical problem. But the solution came in such flashes as that which fell upon his vision when he reached the crest of Snowdon, and saw that 'universal spectacle', 'shaped' for his 'admiration and delight'.

It begins to be clear, to me at least, why Wordsworth wears so well. There are in our world currents of thought that are central, and others that are merely contributaries, or wander off into the bogs and deserts of philosophy. That stream which first became defined in Kant's philosophy, and continued to flow however irregularly through the minds of Schelling, Coleridge, Kierkegaard, Hegel, Nietzsche, Husserl, Heidegger, divided by a watershed from the contrary stream to which we can attach the names of Locke, Condillac, Hartley, Bentham, Marx and Lenin—that first stream to which we give the fashionable name of Existentialism, but which is really the main tradition of philosophy itself—in that stream Wordsworth is confidently carried. Other poets of his time and since his time may give us keener thrills of pure aesthetic

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pleasure. Wordsworth can move us in that way, too, but his singular distinction is the centrality and traditional validity of his philosophical faith. We go to Wordsworth's poetry for something more lasting than pleasure, and for something more human than beauty. We go to Wordsworth

*For that which moves with light and life informed,
Actual, divine, and true.*

This faith Wordsworth ascribed:

*To fear and love,
To love as first and chief, for there fear ends. . . .
 . . . to early intercourse,
In presence of sublime and lovely forms.
With the adverse principles of pain and joy. . . .
 By love, . . .
 . . . all grandeur comes,
All truth and beauty, from pervading love;
That gone, we are as dust.*

But this *intellectual* love, as he calls it in 1805, or *spiritual* love as he calls it in 1850, cannot exist without Imagination:

*another name for absolute strength
And clearest insight, amplitude of mind,
And reason in her most exalted mood.*

Love of this kind is but another name for *das Umgreifende*: the experience of the Comprehensive, that faculty which enabled the poet to

*tread on shadowy ground, to sink
Deep—and, aloft ascending, breathe in worlds
To which the heaven of heavens is but a veil.*

ESSAY III

In Defence of Shelley

[i]

Shelley has always had his enemies. For the most part they have been what we might call political enemies. Caring little for literature as such, these critics of the poet have fastened on his social and ethical ideas and have seen in them a subversive influence to be opposed with all the powers of law and tradition. With such critics we are not really concerned; they no longer count in the controversy, for Shelley has been universally acknowledged as a poet, and his poetry is part of our culture. To dethrone Shelley it is no longer sufficient to prove his atheism or his anarchism, or any other alleged form of intellectual perversity; the critic must destroy his reputation as a poet, trusting that then he will silently disappear from our Parnassus carrying with him his dangerous load of mischief.

A frontal attack on that poetry would not be very effective. You may say that this poem or that poem is bad, but however many reasons you bring forward to support your opinion, an opinion and a personal opinion it remains. Your audience will simply register their disagreement, and continue to admire the poetry in their own way. But if somehow you can imply that it is rather bad form to admire Shelley's poetry, that it is the mark of an inferior taste, of muddled thought and vulgar sensibility, then you will set up a sort of fashionable inhibition far more powerful in its effect and far wider in its range. People will not

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like Shelley's poetry because they will not read it. His reputation will die of neglect.

The first necessity, therefore, will be a position of moral and intellectual superiority; a consequent air of condescension. Coleridge first suggested these tactics, but with the safeguard of his infinite humility and understanding:

'I think as highly of Shelley's genius—yea, and of his *heart*—as you can do. Soon after he left Oxford, he went to the lakes, poor fellow! and with some wish, I have understood, to see me; but I was absent, and Southey received him instead. Now—the very reverse of what would have been the case in ninety-nine instances of a hundred—I *might* have been of use to him, and Southey could not; for I should have sympathised with his poetics, metaphysical reveries, and the very word metaphysics is an abomination to Southey, and Shelley would have felt that I understood him. His discussions—tending towards atheism of a certain sort—would not have scared *me*; for *me* it would have been a semi-transparent larva, soon to be sloughed, and through which I should have seen the true *imago*—the final metamorphosis. Besides, I have ever thought that sort of atheism the next best religion to Christianity; nor does the better faith I have learnt from Paul and John interfere with the cordial reverence I feel for Benedict Spinoza.'¹

There is a generosity about Coleridge's sympathy which is very disarming; but there is also a fatal quality of pity. There is an assumption that Shelley was weak, or stumbling, or even blind, and that he, Coleridge, could be *of some use* to him.

¹ This is quoted from a letter of Coleridge's by Hogg (*Life*, ch. xiv). The same gist is given in a conversation with Coleridge recorded by J. H. Frere (see the Nonesuch *Coleridge*, p. 481). 'Shelley was a man of great power as a poet, and could he only have had some plane whereon to stand, and look down upon his own mind, he would have succeeded. There are flashes of the true spirit to be met with in his works. Poor Shelley, it is a pity I often think that I never met with him. I could have done him good... etc.'

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But this, as we shall see, is an entirely gratuitous assumption. Such as were Shelley's opinions at this time (in 1815) they were opinions honestly arrived at, and held by the poet with no essential variations to the day of his death.

It is difficult to find any excuses for the insufferable superiority of Matthew Arnold. His essay on Shelley, a review of Dowden's *Life*, is even from a literary point of view about as poor a piece of work as Arnold ever perpetrated. Its very style is infected with prejudice and disdain. In matter it is little more than a summary of Dowden's volumes, ending with that sublime sneer: *What a set!* Arnold, we are made to feel, had formed an ideal image of Shelley, a Shelley suggested by Hogg's description of the poet which Arnold had written down the first time he read it, and had always borne in his mind: 'Nor was the moral expression less beautiful than the intellectual; for there was a softness, a delicacy, a gentleness, and especially (though this may surprise many) that air of profound religious veneration that characterizes the best works and chiefly the frescoes (and into these they infused their whole souls) of the great masters of Florence and of Rome.' Dowden, in his blind and blundering way, had shattered this image—had forced upon us 'much in him which is ridiculous and odious'. The image, Arnold tried to persuade himself, still subsisted; but 'with many a scar and stain; never again will it have the same pureness and beauty which it had formerly'. In the bitterness of his disillusion Arnold resorts to strong words—words whose force is not mitigated by their foreignness. 'It is a sore trial for our love of Shelley. What a set! what a world!' is the exclamation that breaks from us as we come to an end of this history of "the occurrences of Shelley's private life". I used the French word *bête* for a letter of Shelley's; for the world in which we find him I can only use another French word, *sale*'.

Such righteous indignation sounds merely comical today,

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but we have no reason to doubt its sincerity. To recover the background of moral snobbery from which it proceeded would need a considerable effort of imagination; and it would be an effort wasted. Arnold, to do him justice, did not let his moral prejudice altogether obliterate his literary judgment. In the essay from which I have quoted, he excuses himself from dealing with Shelley's poetry for want of space—warning us, however, that the poetry would not get off unscathed. 'Let no one suppose that a want of humour and a self-delusion such as Shelley's have no effect upon a man's poetry. The man Shelley, in very truth, is not entirely sane, and Shelley's poetry is not entirely sane either.' And then he ends by repeating, from his essay on Byron, that trumpery phrase of which he was evidently so proud, about the beautiful and ineffectual angel 'beating in the void his luminous wings in vain'.

I have said that we find Arnold's attitude comical today; but perhaps I should have said that we find the expression he gave to his attitude comical. For if we were all agreed that the whole pother raised by Arnold could now be dismissed as one of the minor absurdities of the Victorian age, there would be no need for this essay in defence of Shelley. But Arnold's attitude has been repeated in our time by no less a critic than Mr T. S. Eliot, in a lecture given at Harvard University in 1933.¹ But in Mr Eliot's case we shall find that the overt emphasis is not so much on the poet's morals, as on his ideas. Naturally the ideas cannot be separated from the morals, nor either from the poetry; but, before a modern audience, a master of critical strategy could not fail to concentrate his attack on the ideas.

Mr Eliot's main charge against Shelley is one of intellectual incoherence. Incidentally he reveals a pretty strong distaste for the poet's personality, which is perhaps a logical consequence of the main charge. At the risk of some distortion I

¹ *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*. London (Faber), 1933, 87–102.

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must give a summary of the whole indictment. ‘The ideas of Shelley’, Mr Eliot begins, ‘seem to me always to be ideas of adolescence. . . . And an enthusiasm for Shelley seems to me also to be an affair of adolescence. . . . I find his ideas repellent; and the difficulty of separating Shelley from his ideas and beliefs is still greater than with Wordsworth. And the biographical interest which Shelley has always excited makes it difficult to read the poetry without remembering the man; and the man was humourless, pedantic, self-centred, and sometimes almost a blackguard. Except for an occasional flash of shrewd sense, when he is speaking of someone else and not concerned with his own affairs or with fine writing, his letters are insufferably dull.’ So far the items in the charge are almost the same as Arnold’s, only a little more restrained in formulation. But after a page or so of concessions, Mr Eliot returns to his main point: ‘But some of Shelley’s views I positively dislike, and that hampers my enjoyment of the poems in which they occur; and others seem to me so puerile that I cannot enjoy the poems in which they occur.’ This leads to a discussion of the now famous problem of Belief and Poetry, and to the conclusion, in respect of Shelley, that ‘when the doctrine, theory, belief or “view of life” presented in a poem is one which the mind of the reader can accept as coherent, mature, and founded on the facts of experience, it interposes no obstacle to the reader’s enjoyment, whether it be one that he accept or deny, approve or deprecate. When it is one which the reader rejects as childish or feeble, it may, for a reader of well-developed mind, set up an almost complete check. . . . I can only regret that Shelley did not live to put his poetic gifts, which were certainly of the first order, at the service of more tenable beliefs—which need not have been, for my purposes, beliefs more acceptable to me.’

I propose, by way of answering this general charge against Shelley, to establish two points: the maturity and permanent

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worth of his best poetry, and the irrelevance of that mare's-nest of Belief, first introduced into the discussion of poetry by Dr I. A. Richards. Incidentally I shall suggest that Shelley's ideas do not deserve the scorn heaped upon them by Mr Eliot, whose attitude, in common with Coleridge's and Arnold's, is based on simpler if obscurer psychological reactions. In these reactions more poets and perhaps greater poets than Shelley are involved—(Goethe, for example, of whom Mr Eliot writes: 'it is perhaps truer to say that he dabbled in both philosophy and poetry and made no great success of either.') It will be found, I fancy, that it is the nature of the poet that is involved—not the actual recognition or definition of poetry itself in specific instances. When beliefs do not enter into the question—as in the case of Landor or of Keats—then I think Mr Eliot and I would find a complete measure of agreement.

[ii]

Obviously my first concern must be to vindicate the high value of Shelley's poetry. It is curious that all these detractors of the poetry make vague but generous gestures of acceptance which are at variance with their detailed statements. To Coleridge Shelley is 'a man of great power as a poet'; Arnold speaks of 'the charm of the man's writings—of Shelley's poetry. It is his poetry, above everything else, which for many people establishes that he is an angel'. As for Mr Eliot, though he confesses that he never opens the volume of his poems 'simply because I want to read poetry, but only with some special reason for reference', yet, as we have seen, Shelley's poetic gifts 'were certainly of the first order'. Not a critical judgment, but some moral asceticism, would seem to be the basis of Mr Eliot's disdain. He does, it is true, accuse Shelley of 'a good deal which is just bad jingling', but he admits that *The Triumph of Life*, though unfinished, is a great

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poem. He admits to liking the last stanza of *Prometheus Unbound*. But this is about as far as his direct statements about the poetry go; for the rest, he is 'thoroughly gravelled', not by the poems themselves, but by the 'shabby' ideas expressed in them.¹

At first Shelley's own attitude towards poetry as an art, and towards his own poetry in particular, seems to be decidedly treacherous. As early as 1813, when engaged on his first considerable poem, *Queen Mab*, we find him taking up an attitude which implies a certain contempt for the formal aspects of poetry. At the same time, from the very beginning, what we might in our modern fashion call an indifference to pure poetry is combined with what we would least expect—an avoidance of didactic poetry. Writing to Hogg in the year mentioned, Shelley says: 'My poems will, I fear, little stand the criticism even of friendship; some of the latter ones have the merit of conveying a meaning in every word, and all are faithful pictures of my feelings at the time of writing them. But they are, in a great measure, abrupt and obscure—all breathing hatred of despotism and bigotry; but, I think, not too openly for publication. One fault they are indisputably exempt from, that of being a volume of fashionable literature.' This would seem to be a fair confession of didacticism, but a few weeks later, writing to the same correspondent, he makes a much more positive statement to the contrary effect: '*Queen Mab* will be in ten cantos, and will contain about twenty-eight hundred lines; the other poems contain probably as much more. The notes to *Queen Mab* will be long and philosophical; I shall take that opportunity, which I judge to be a safe one, of submitting for public discussion principles of

¹ Under the influence of Leone Vivante, Mr Eliot has now 'a new and more sympathetic appreciation' of Shelley: see his Preface to Signor Vivante's *English Poetry*, London (Faber), 1950. But this must not be taken as an approval of Shelley's general philosophy, but merely of 'recurrent insights which turn up again and again in Shelley's poetry'.

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reformation, which I decline to do syllogistically in the poem. A poem very didactic is, I think, very stupid.' This distinction between poetry which is philosophical and yet at the same time not didactic deserves more examination than it has been given by critics of Shelley; it is important for our conception of Shelley's life and personality, as well as for any exact judgment on his poetry. Considering the strength of Shelley's moral and political views, it is a great proof of his instinctive sense of the limits of the art that he never for a moment thought of using poetry as an instrument of propaganda. Even as late as 1819 he could write (in a letter to Peacock): 'I consider poetry very subordinate to moral and political science, and if I were well, certainly I would aspire to the latter, for I can conceive a great work, embodying the discoveries of all ages, and harmonizing the contending creeds by which mankind have been ruled.' And this, in spite of the intervening *Defence of Poetry* in which he deepened and yet clarified his philosophy, remained his feeling to the end; for in his last letter to Peacock, written in the year of his death, he confesses 'I wish I had something better to do than furnish this jingling food for the hunger of oblivion, called verse, but I have not; and since you give me no encouragement about India I cannot hope to have.' In a footnote Peacock informs us that Shelley had expressed a desire to be employed politically at the court of a native prince.

In his last years in Italy Shelley used to wear a ring inscribed with the motto: *Il buon tempo verrà*—The good time will come; or, as he himself interpreted it: 'There is a tide both in public and in private affairs, which awaits both men and nations.' Shelley was by nature an optimist. During his short life he had more than a normal share of suffering, and often expressed his disillusionment with mankind. But in his political philosophy he remained an optimist, and his poetry, is inspired by the intensest faith in life.

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(In this respect he stood apart from most of his fellow romantics. Romantic philosophy, as expressed at its source by Schelling, and as interpreted in England by our greatest romantic philosopher, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, was not optimistic. It was deeply tinged by that reaction to the contemplation of human existence which takes the form of dread or anxiety, and from it developed, during the course of the nineteenth century, the two pessimistic creeds of nihilism and existentialism. Shelley was untouched by this turbid stream of thought.) He knew Coleridge and had read even some of his prose works. He possessed some of the works of Kant, though there is no evidence to show that he had ever read them. There is no need, however, to pursue such negative evidence, for Shelley's real interests are not in doubt. His mind was fed, if not formed, by Plato among the ancients and by Godwin among his contemporaries. (It was reinforced, as time went on, by the Neo-Platonists, by Bacon, Hume, Berkeley, Spinoza, and above all by Rousseau, whose name he held sacred, whose imagination had, he said, 'divine beauty', and whom he was to make the central figure in his last poem. All these thinkers contributed in some degree to that blend of idealism and rationalism which makes up Shelley's philosophy.)

We must remember that Shelley's life only lasted thirty years. His mind developed precociously, but from his school-days until 1815, that is to say, until his twenty-third year, it merely absorbed and reflected the ideas of others—notably those of William Godwin. The decisive change that came about in 1815 was due, no doubt, to the accumulation of emotional and financial worries during the previous twelve months. Shelley was finding the world a tougher place than Godwin had led him to expect it to be; and incidentally Godwin himself with his insatiable demands for financial aid was one of the agents of disillusion. But the greatest agency in

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this change in Shelley had been the passionate experiences of that year: his desertion of Harriet, his love for and elopement with Mary Godwin, and all the melancholy consequences of that defiance of social conventions. Life itself was in doubt, for in the Spring of 1815 a physician had told Shelley that he was dying rapidly of consumption; abscesses had formed in his lungs and he suffered acute spasms. But relief was at hand. At the beginning of this same year Shelley's grandfather had died, and Shelley's financial worries suddenly came to an end. In the calm that succeeded the storm of 1814, and with the security provided by a settlement with his father, Shelley was able to retreat into solitude, and in this solitude not only was his health restored, but he succeeded in coming to an intellectual settlement with himself. The immediate result was *Alastor, or the Spirit of Solitude*, a poem in which Shelley's original philosophy first makes a tentative appearance. I say 'tentative' because the philosophy as such is clothed in allegory, and Shelley himself felt bound to explain the poem in a Preface. He draws a contrast between those 'unseeing multitudes' who are selfish, blind, torpid, morally dead, and the 'adventurous genius' who is 'led forth by an imagination inflamed and purified through familiarity with all that is excellent and majestic, to the contemplation of the universe'. This genius imagines to himself a Being or Power, all wonderful, wise and beautiful. 'He seeks in vain for a prototype of his conception. Blasted by his disappointment, he descends to an untimely grave.'

Alastor is not a very optimistic poem, you might conclude. But actually it is inspired by the strongest faith in the beauty and goodness of the universe, and in the love and joy which can be realised by communion with Nature.

*By solemn vision, and bright silver dream,
His infancy was nurtured. Every sight*

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*And sound from the vast earth and ambient air,
Sent to his heart its choicest impulses.
The fountains of divine philosophy
Fled not his thirsting lips, and all of great,
Or good, or lovely, which the sacred past
In truth or fable consecrates, he felt
And knew.*

It may be said that there is nothing very original about this philosophy, and indeed, *Alastor* was written under the immediate influence of Wordsworth's *Excursion*, which had been recently published. But there are original notes, not only in the verse, but also among the ideas expressed by the verse. A more precise formulation of these ideas is to be found in a series of moral and philosophical essays which belong to the same period as *Alastor*. These are important because they show that most of the ideas that were to be embodied in his later and greater poems, and in *A Defence of Poetry*, were already taking shape in Shelley's mind.

The critical slander which accuses Shelley of intellectual adolescence, muddled thinking and obscure writing can hardly be based on a reading of these essays. Although they suffer from their incompleteness, they are remarkable by-products of a few weeks' poetic activity in a man's twenty-fourth year. In so far as they are complete, they are acutely and logically reasoned; and even as fragments they must strike any unprejudiced reader as the expression of a curious and vital intelligence.

From the essay 'On Life' we may take a statement of Shelley's revised philosophical position from which he was never to depart. 'I confess', he says, 'that I am one of those who am unable to refuse my assent to the conclusions of those philosophers who assert that nothing exists but as it is perceived'; and he goes on to describe an 'intellectual system',

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whose main outlines he no doubt owed to Berkeley. I will quote the most significant paragraph:

'It is a decision against which our persuasions struggle, and we must be long convicted before we can be convinced that the solid universe of external things is "such stuff as dreams are made of". The shocking absurdities of the popular philosophy of mind and matter, its fatal consequences in morals, and their violent dogmatism concerning the source of all things, had early conducted me to materialism. This materialism is a seducing system to young and superficial minds. It allows its disciples to talk, and dispenses them from thinking. But I was discontented with such a view of things as it afforded; man is a being of such high aspirations, "looking both before and after", whose "thoughts wander through eternity", disclaiming alliance with transience and decay; incapable of imagining to himself annihilation; existing but in the future and the past; being, not what he is, but what he has been and shall be. Whatever may be his true and final destination, there is a spirit within him at enmity with nothingness and dissolution. This is the character of all life and being. . . . Such contemplations as these, materialism and the popular philosophy of mind and matter alike forbid; they are only consistent with the intellectual system.'

Alastor, according to Shelley's own Preface, was designed to show the dangers of an exclusive concentration on such an intellectual system. He had discovered that the intellectual faculties—the imagination, the functions of sense—"have their respective requisitions on the sympathy of corresponding powers in other human beings". And so arose Shelley's doctrine of sympathy or love, to take a central place in his philosophy. It is beautifully outlined in one of the prose fragments of 1815:

'Thou demandest what is love? It is that powerful attraction

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towards all that we conceive, or fear, or hope beyond ourselves, when we find within our own thoughts the chasm of an insufficient void, and seek to awaken in all things that are, a community with what we experience within ourselves. If we reason, we would be understood; if we imagine, we would that the airy children of our brain were born anew within another's; if we feel, we would that another's nerves should vibrate to our own, that the beams of their eyes should kindle at once and mix and melt into our own, that lips of motionless ice should not reply to lips quivering and burning with the heart's best blood. This is Love. This the bond and the sanction which connects not only man with man, but with everything which exists. We are born into the world, and there is something within us which, from the instant that we live, more and more thirsts after its likeness.'

This aspect of his philosophy was to receive its supreme expression in *Epipsychedion*, written at Pisa six years later:

*True love in this differs from gold and clay,
That to divide is not to take away.
Love is like understanding, that grows bright,
Gazing on many truths; 'tis like thy light,
Imagination! which from earth and sky,
Aid from the depths of human fantasy,
As from a thousand prisms and mirrors, fills
The Universe with glorious beams, and kills
Error, the worm, with many a sun-like arrow
Of its reverberated lightning . . .¹*

Shelley's philosophy of love, which caused so much dismay in his lifetime, is still too unorthodox, and most people would say too impracticable, to be acceptable even now, when the science of human relations and the blinder drift of public manners have led to more tolerance of what is vulgarly

¹ This quotation is repeated in a fuller context on p. 255 below.

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known as ‘free love’. But there is nothing vulgar about the philosophy expounded in *Epipsychedion*. The only comparable work, by which it was much influenced, is Plato’s *Symposium*, and the one is as pure and noble in conception as the other. Shelley himself compared his poem to the *Vita Nuova* of Dante, and he suggested that both poems were ‘sufficiently intelligible to a certain class of readers without a matter-of-fact history of the circumstances to which (they) relate’; and to a certain other class both poems must, he said, ‘ever remain incomprehensible, from a defect of a common organ of perception for the ideas which (they) treat’. What Shelley meant by love in this poem is not in doubt—in his own words it is ‘the bond and the sanction which connects, not only man with man, but with everything which exists’. But like Plato and Dante, Shelley was ready to insist that such love is not necessarily ethereal, but should be embodied in our human relationships.

*We—are we not formed, as notes of music are,
For one another, though dissimilar;
Such difference without discord, as can make
Those sweetest sounds, in which all spirits shake
As trembling leaves in a continuous air?*

The poet, especially an original poet like Shelley, is always conscious of the limited effect of all his work. ‘*Prometheus* was never intended for more than five or six persons,’ he wrote in a letter to Gisborne, and for a poet with ‘a passion for reforming the world’ this is a bitter realization. It would be an intolerable realization were there no compensations in prospect; and what is in prospect is a matter of faith—of faith in one’s appeal to a jury ‘impanelled by Time from the selectest of the wise of many generations’. It will be noticed that this jury is of the wise, and not merely of the sensitive; and Shelley uses the word deliberately. For whilst avoiding like the plague

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the didactic use of poetry, Shelley is far from that theory of pure poetry, which would exempt poetry from any useful effect whatsoever. Poetry might after all be an essential process in the great work of regenerating mankind—a preparation of the mind for the seeds of moral and political science, which otherwise might fall on rocky ground. The image is not a very noble one, but there are one or two statements of Shelley's which will give it a full idealistic force: for example, this from the Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*: 'For my part I had rather be damned with Plato and Lord Bacon, than go to Heaven with Paley and Malthus. But it is a mistake to suppose that I dedicate my poetical compositions solely to the direct enforcement of reform, or that I consider them in any degree as containing a reasoned system on the theory of human life. Didactic poetry is my abhorrence; nothing can be equally well expressed in prose that is not tedious and supererogatory in verse. My purpose has hitherto been simply to familiarise the highly refined imagination of the more select classes of poetical readers with beautiful idealisms of moral excellence; aware that until the mind can love, and admire, and trust, and hope, and endure, reasoned principles of moral conduct are seeds cast upon the highway of life which the unconscious passenger tramples into dust, although they would bear the harvest of his happiness.'

In a cancelled passage from the Preface to *Adonais* Shelley introduces the notion of 'sympathy', which we may find useful: 'If I understand myself, I have written neither for profit nor for fame. I have employed my poetical compositions and publications simply as the instruments of that sympathy between myself and others which the ardent and unbounded love I cherished for my kind incited me to acquire.' But the most explicit statement of his aims comes in the *Defence of Poetry*, there given a generalization and philosophical dignity which make that essay the profoundest treatment of the sub-

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ject in the English language. The essay opens with a distinction between reason and imagination which is the fundamental distinction for the whole of this question, and which is a proof, if any were required, of the precision with which Shelley used his terms. The two modes of mental action are distinguished as 'mind contemplating the relations borne by one thought to another, however produced', and as 'mind acting upon those thoughts so as to colour them with its own light, and composing from them, as from elements, other thoughts, each containing within itself the principle of its own integrity'. Reason is analysis, or 'the enumeration of quantities already known'; imagination is synthesis, or 'the perception of the value of those quantities, both separately and as a whole. Reason respects the differences, and imagination the similitudes of things. Reason is to the imagination as the instrument to the agent ...'

Poetry is then defined as the instrument of the imagination, as distinct from science, which is the instrument of the reason. But poetry acts in a way peculiar to itself; 'it awakens and enlarges the mind itself by rendering it the receptacle of a thousand unapprehended combinations of thought.' These combinations of thought are due to that principle of sympathy already referred to, which is not only the mode of action typical of poetry, but also of morals. This identification of poetry and morality must be dealt with separately, but for the moment we will keep to the poetic process, which is further defined as an enlargement of the circumference of the imagination 'by replenishing it with thoughts of every new delight, which have the power of attracting and assimilating to their own nature all other thoughts, and which form new intervals and interstices whose void forever craves fresh food. Poetry strengthens the faculty which is the organ of the moral nature of man, in the same manner as exercise strengthens a limb'.

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This dynamical, this almost physical conception of poetry, is extended in other directions which show how closely Shelley observed the psychological nature of his own activity. The ranging, gathering, accumulative character of the poetic process is not its only function; the materials poetry attracts to itself must be controlled, and a desire is therefore engendered in the mind to reproduce and arrange these materials 'according to a certain rhythm and order which may be called the beautiful and the good'. But such rhythm and order can only be engendered in the unconscious mind. 'Poetry is not like reasoning, a power to be exerted according to the determination of the will. A man cannot say, "I will compose poetry". The greatest poet even cannot say it; for the mind in creation is as a fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness; this power arises from within, like the colour of a flower which fades and changes as it is developed, and the conscious portions of our natures are unprophetic either of its approach or its departure.' Nevertheless, and this is an observation which a less scrupulous psychologist might have omitted, 'the frequent recurrence of the poetical power . . . may produce in the mind a habit of order and harmony correlative with its own nature and with its effects upon other minds.'

The *Defence of Poetry* is an uncompleted essay, and it would be unreasonable to complain that it leaves many problems of poetry undiscussed. We miss, in particular, Shelley's observations on the technique of poetry. In a sense he was singularly uninterested in the subject, being content to take over the prevailing diction, which was, indeed, the reformed diction of Coleridge and Wordsworth. But there is little evidence that he had their reforming zeal, and if it suited his purpose he was just as ready to take over the technique of Spenser or Milton. He refers to *Adonais* as 'a highly-wrought piece of art',

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which is curiously suggestive of the attitude against which Wordsworth had revolted. On the other hand, in the *Defence of Poetry* he admits innovation as a necessary principle in verse. 'An observation of the regular mode of the recurrence of harmony in the language of poetical minds, together with its relation to music, produced metre, or a certain system of traditional forms of harmony and language. Yet it is by no means essential that a poet should accommodate his language to this traditional form, so that harmony, which is its spirit, be observed. The practice is indeed convenient and popular, and to be preferred, especially in such composition as includes much action: but every great poet must inevitably innovate upon the example of his predecessors in the exact structure of his peculiar versification.' And what he meant by this last phrase he had explained on a previous page, in a passage which shows how innately sound his poetic practice was—being based, as all true poetry must be based, on the material qualities of language. Language, colour, form, and religious and civil habits of action, are all the instruments and materials of poetry. . . . But poetry in a more restricted sense expresses those arrangements of language, and especially metrical language, which are created by that imperial faculty, whose throne is curtained within the invisible nature of man. And this springs from the nature itself of language, which is a more direct representation of the actions and passions of our internal being, and is susceptible of more various and delicate combinations, than colour, form, or motion, and is more plastic and obedient to the control of that faculty of which it is the creation. For language is arbitrarily produced by the imagination, and has relation to thoughts alone; but all other materials, instruments, and conditions of art, have relations among each other, which limit and interpose between conception and expression.' He then contrasts poetry, in this respect, with the arts of sculpture, painting, and music, and

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concludes that such arts can never equal poetry as an expression of the immediacy of thought.

Such a clear perception of the nature of poetry does not necessarily imply an ability to put precept into practice, and since the precepts were a late product of his short life, we must be prepared for much immature prentice work. For Shelley began publishing whilst still a boy at school, and in spite of his hero Godwin's opinion that early authorship was detrimental to the cause of general happiness, during the rest of his life his productions were sent to the press with almost indecent haste. Shelley always had the itch to see himself in print, and as heir to a fortune, if not in actual possession of money, he could always find a ready publisher. His collected poems, in the standard Oxford edition, make a volume of a thousand pages. How much of this bulk Shelley himself would have suppressed it would be presumptuous to guess; but any true friend of Shelley would willingly unload half of it into oblivion, and even some proportion of the rest he would only keep, as Mr Eliot keeps the lot, for reference. A decisive change came in the year 1816, a year in which Shelley wrote very little, in which his poetic faculty seemed to lie fallow, numbed by domestic anxieties—the hostility of the Westbrooks, the intransigence of Godwin, ill-health, the lack of money. At the end of that year came Harriet's suicide, from which he sought some relief in the concentration of composition—the result being *The Revolt of Islam*, a poem of 4,818 lines. There was concentration only in the act, not in the issue. To follow Shelley's development of his theme is like following the course of a mighty river, from mouth to source: at first everything is wide, even and aqueous, but as we proceed the stream narrows and the surface breaks, flowing with a more obvious force and music—an image perhaps suggested by the subject-matter of *The Revolt of Islam*. Shelley tells us in his Preface that his object was 'to enlist the harmony of

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metrical language, the ethereal combinations of the fancy, the rapid and subtle transitions of human passion, all those elements which essentially compose a Poem, in the cause of a liberal and comprehensive morality. . . . For this purpose I have chosen a story of human passion in its most universal character, diversified with moving and romantic adventures, and appealing, in contempt of all artificial opinions or institutions, to the common sympathies of every human breast. . . . The Poem therefore . . . is narrative, not didactic. It is a succession of pictures illustrating the growth and progress of individual mind aspiring after excellence, and devoted to the love of mankind . . . : The very phrases—a succession of pictures, ethereal combinations of the fancy—do not promise a coherent form; and when Shelley further informs the reader that he has chosen the Spenserian stanza because he was enticed ‘by the brilliancy and magnificence of sound which a mind that has been nourished upon musical thoughts can produce by a just and harmonious arrangement of the pauses of this measure’, that reader should not be surprised to find a poem whose action is dissipated in incident, whose theme is lost in a jungle of imagery. We seem to drift aimlessly always in some kind of boat or bark, upon some torrent or flood; and it is only in the last line of the poem that we find a haven, uncertain of the way we have come, indifferent, after so much wandering, to our destiny:

*Motionless resting on the lake awhile,
I saw its marge of snow-bright mountains rear
Their peaks aloft, I saw each radiant isle,
And in the midst, afar, even like a sphere
Hung in one hollow sky, did there appear
The Temple of the Spirit; on the sound
Which issued thence, drawn nearer and more near,
Like the swift moon this glorious earth around,
The charmed boat approached, and there its haven found.*

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This last stanza is representative enough of all the five hundred odd which compose the poem; Shelley uses his measure with mastery, and where he fails, in comparison with Spenser, is not in the mere manipulation of words, but in their choice. Spenser was very particular about his words; even pedantic. Shelley confesses, in his Preface, to an indifference on this very point: 'Nor have I permitted any system relating to mere words to divert the attention of the reader, from whatever interest I may have succeeded in creating, to my own ingenuity in contriving to disgust them according to the rules of criticism. I have simply clothed my thoughts in what appeared to me the most obvious and appropriate language. A person familiar with nature, and with the most celebrated productions of the human mind, can scarcely err in following the instinct, with respect to selection of language, produced by that familiarity.' There is obviously some oblique reference here—perhaps to Wordsworth's Preface to his Poems published in 1815. But though Shelley is right, in so far as he is relying on the subconscious origination of appropriate language (according to the theory he was, as we have seen, to state explicitly in *A Defence of Poetry*), yet there is in this passage a certain uneasiness, a certain anticipation of criticism, which is a confession of self-criticism. In a letter replying to Godwin's criticism of the poem, Shelley says: 'The poem was produced by a series of thoughts which filled my mind with unbounded and sustained enthusiasm. I felt the precariousness of my life, and I engaged in this task, resolved to leave some record of myself. Much of what the volume contains was written with the same feeling—as real, though not so prophetic—as the communications of a dying man.' Shelley, we might say, always wrote with one eye on posterity and the other on his tomb; and the feverish haste entailed by such an attitude leads to qualities which the most sympathetic critic cannot excuse. There is not a single long composition of

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Shelley which does not suffer from prolixity, from lack of those most precious qualities of precision and objectivity. At the same time we must not blame Shelley for failing to express qualities which were not in his nature; certain human features and faculties are antithetical, and we are asking for a monster if we look for them all in the same personality. Shelley, as we shall see later, was not what the psychologists call 'a visual type'; he was a transcendentalist, for whom words are never sufficient for the vision they must express.

This question, the fundamental one for the appreciation of Shelley's poetry, had better be discussed in relation to a more considerable poem than *The Revolt of Islam*. If I dismiss *The Revolt of Islam*, it is not because I think it can be ignored; it is a poem of many individual beauties, and even if the whole is 'sick with excess of sweetness', there is throughout a spirit of intellectual energy which lifts it into significance, making it a part, if only a prelude, of Shelley's great achievement. That achievement, in its strictly poetic aspects, is represented by *Prometheus Unbound*, written little more than a year after *The Revolt of Islam*, by *Epipsychedion* and *Adonais*, written the year before his death, and by various shorter odes and lyrics, all written in the last four years of his life. These three groups have certain characteristics in common, and possibly they merge into one another; but they have qualities which are distinct enough to justify a separate classification.

In concentrating on these three groups we shall be neglecting certain works of which perhaps *The Cenci* is the only one which must be explained away—other notable poems, such as *The Witch of Atlas*, *Hellas*, and *The Triumph of Life*, I regard as conforming in every way to the characteristics of one or other of the typical poems mentioned. But *The Cenci* is a different matter. Byron called it 'sad work', and if not for the same reason ('the subject renders it so') I agree with this judgment of a friend and contemporary of the poet. For Shelley it

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was an experiment—an attempt to be objective, *sachlich*. But he was writing against the grain of his personality, and knew it. ‘Those writings which I have hitherto published’, he tells Leigh Hunt in a Dedicatory Letter, ‘have been little else than visions which impersonate my own apprehensions of the beautiful and the just. I can also perceive in them the literary defects incidental to youth and impatience; they are dreams of what ought to be, or may be. The drama which I now present to you is a sad reality. I lay aside the presumptuous attitude of an instructor, and am content to paint, with such colours as my own heart furnishes, that which has been.’ It was a brave gesture, but doomed to failure. Far from the subject being the cause of this failure, it is its very horror which compels a certain dramatic vitality, and makes it even possible to act the drama with some effect. But as poetry, both in the limited sense as blank verse and in the general sense as the creation of poetic character and atmosphere, it does not begin to be a great tragedy. It is a pastiche of Elizabethan drama, of Webster in particular, and as a form has no originality and lacks that ‘something wholly new and relative to the age’ which Shelley recognised in *Don Juan* and longed to possess. Even at its most forceful the verse is wooden, unnatural.

*How comes this hair undone?
Its wandering strings must be what blind me so,
And yet I tied it fast.—O, horrible!
The pavement sinks under my feet! The walls
Spin round! I see a woman weeping there,
And standing calm and motionless, whilst I
Slide giddily as the world reels.... My God!
The beautiful blue heaven is flecked with blood!
The sunshine on the floor is black! The air
Is changed to vapours such as the dead breathe
In charnel pits! Pah! I am choked! There creeps*

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*A clinging, black contaminating mist
About me . . . 'tis substantial, heavy, thick,
I cannot pluck it from me, for it glues
My fingers and my limbs to one another,
And eats into my sinews, and dissolves
My flesh to a pollution, poisoning
The subtle, pure, and inmost spirit of life!.
My God! I never knew what the mad felt
Before; for I am mad beyond all doubt!
(More wildly) No, I am dead! These putrefying limbs
Shut round and sepulchre the panting soul
Which would burst forth into the wandering air!*

There is worse ranting in Elizabethan drama, even in Webster. But we have only to compare the speeches of Shelley's Beatrice with those of Shakespeare's Isabella to see the difference between a literary conception of character and the lively representation of a human being. However justified the conventions of art may be, they must never contradict the purpose of a particular art-form, and the purpose of drama is, as Shelley realized, fundamentally realistic; it depends on the possibility of the audience participating in the emotional life of the characters. But this will never be achieved by merely negative precautions. 'I have avoided with great care in writing this play the introduction of what is commonly called mere poetry. . . . I have written . . . without an over-fastidious and learned choice of words . . . the real language of men in general . . .' Thus Shelley may protest his good intentions, but he is once again really apologising for his impetuosity; and in stripping that impetuosity of its concordant imagery, he was merely reducing the quality without restraining the quantity of his mode of expression. He was being unnatural, and when he had written *Epipsychedion*, the most natural expression of his genius that he ever gave, he realized it. 'The

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Epipsychedion', he wrote to John Gisborne, 'is a mystery; as to real flesh and blood, you know that I do not deal in those articles; you might as well go to a gin-shop for a leg of mutton, as expect anything human or earthly from me.'

That is the basis upon which I shall attempt to justify the poetry of Shelley—not condemn it as failing to achieve something which was not in the nature of the poet, but praise it for expressing, with an unsurpassed perfection, qualities which belonged to the poet and which are of peculiar value to humanity. But first I think it is necessary to establish the psychological type to which Shelley belonged.

[iii]

Anything like an exact psychological analysis of a poet who lived more than a hundred years ago is beyond the scope of literary criticism. The psychologist, on the basis of many anecdotes of his life, by a careful examination and classification of the imagery of his poetry, might be able to arrive at some definite conclusions. But for our present purpose it will be sufficient to establish certain general characteristics, and a knowledge of these may at least save us from the fatuity of blaming the poet for not possessing what it was not in his nature to possess.

If Shelley's life and writings are glanced at with a psychological eye, three significant features will at once be noticed:

- (1) the occurrence, at intervals, of hallucinations of a morbid or pathological nature;
- (2) an abnormal interest in incest motives;
- (3) a general lack of objectivity in his normal mode of self-expression.

The psychologist will immediately form the hypothesis that all these features are related to a common cause, and he will seek to explain them by a general theory of the poet's

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personality and psychological development. We will first state the facts.

Shelley's liability to sudden and somewhat devastating hallucinations is attested by several of his contemporaries, but most clearly, and with some awareness of their significance, by his intimate friend Thomas Love Peacock. The first attack is fully recorded by Harriet Shelley, in a letter to Hogg dated 12th March, 1813:

'On the night of the 26th February we retired to bed between ten and eleven o'clock. We had been in bed about half an hour, when Mr S—— heard a noise proceeding from one of the parlours. He immediately went downstairs with two pistols which he had loaded that night, expecting to have occasion for them. He went into the billiard-room, when he heard footsteps retreating; he followed into another little room, which was called an office. He there saw a man in the act of quitting the room through a glass window which opened into the shrubbery; the man fired at Mr S——, which he avoided. Bysshe then fired, but it flashed in the pan. The man then knocked Bysshe down, and they struggled on the ground. Bysshe then fired his second pistol, which he thought wounded him in his shoulder, as he uttered a shriek and got up, when he said these words: "By God, I will be revenged. I will murder your wife, and will ravish your sister! By God, I will be revenged!" He then fled, as we hoped for the night. Our servants were not gone to bed, but were just going when this horrible affair happened. This was about eleven o'clock. We all assembled in the parlour, where we remained for two hours. Mr S—— then advised us to retire, thinking it was impossible he would make a second attack. We left Bysshe and our man-servant—who had only arrived that day, and who knew nothing of the house—to sit up. I had been in bed three hours when I heard a pistol go off. I immediately ran down-

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stairs, when I perceived that Bysshe's flannel gown had been shot through, and the window-curtain. Bysshe had sent Daniel to see what hour it was, when he heard a noise at the window; he went there, and a man thrust his arm through the glass and fired at him. Thank heaven! the ball went through his gown and he remained unhurt. Mr S—— happened to stand sideways; had he stood fronting, the ball must have killed him. Bysshe fired his pistol, but it would not go off; he then aimed a blow at him with an old sword which we found in the house. The assassin attempted to get the sword from him, and just as he was pulling it away Dan rushed into the room, when he made his escape. This was at four in the morning. It had been a most dreadful night; the wind was as loud as thunder, and the rain descended in torrents. Nothing has been heard of him, and we have every reason to believe it was no stranger, as there is a man . . . who, the next morning, went and told the shopkeepers that it was a tale of Mr Shelley's to impose upon them, that he might leave the country without paying his bills. This they believed, and none of them attempted to do anything towards the discovery. We left Tanyrallt on Sunday.'

This narrative would not survive present scrutiny, for it is full of highly suspicious circumstances. But its genuineness was suspected at the time, and Peacock himself made an investigation. 'I was in North Wales in the summer of 1813,' he relates, 'and heard the matter much talked of. Persons who had examined the premises on the following morning had found that the grass of the lawn appeared to have been much tramped and rolled on, but there were no footmarks on the wet ground, except between the beaten spot and the window; and the impression of the ball on the wainscot showed that the pistol had been fired towards the window, and not from it. This appeared conclusive as to the whole series of opera-

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tions having taken place from within.' That Peacock realized the nature of the hallucination is shown by the comment which follows: 'The mental phenomena in which this sort of semi-delusion originated will be better illustrated by one which occurred at a later period, and which, though less tragical in its appearances, was more circumstantial in its development, and more perseveringly adhered to.'

Of this later affair, Peacock himself was a witness:

'In the early summer of 1816 the spirit of restlessness again came over him, and resulted in a second visit to the Continent. The change of scene was preceded, as more than once before, by a mysterious communication from a person seen only by himself, warning him of immediate personal perils to be incurred by him if he did not instantly depart.

'I was alone at Bishopgate, with him and Mrs Shelley, when the visitation alluded to occurred. About the middle of the day, intending to take a walk, I went into the hall for my hat. His was there, and mine was not. I could not imagine what had become of it; but as I could not walk without it, I returned to the library. After some time had elapsed, Mrs Shelley came in, and gave me an account which she had just received from himself, of the visitor and his communication. I expressed some scepticism on the subject, on which she left me, and Shelley came in, with my hat in his hand. He said: "Mary tells me, you do not believe that I have had a visit from Williams." I said: "I told her there were some improbabilities in the narration." He said: "You know Williams of Tremadoc?" I said: "I do." He said: "It was he who was here to-day. He came to tell me of a plot laid by my father and uncle, to entrap me and lock me up. He was in great haste, and could not stop a minute, and I walked with him to Eg-ham." I said: "What hat did you wear?" He said: "This, to be sure." I said: "I wish you would put it on." He put it on,

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and it went over his face. I said: "You could not have walked to Egham in that hat." He said: "I snatched it up hastily, and perhaps I kept it in my hand. I certainly walked with Williams to Egham, and he told me what I have said. You are very sceptical." I said: "If you are certain of what you say, my scepticism cannot affect your certainty." He said: "It is very hard on a man who has devoted his life to the pursuit of truth, who has made great sacrifices and incurred great sufferings for it, to be treated as a visionary. If I do not know that I saw Williams, how do I know that I see you?" I said: "An idea may have a force of a sensation; but the oftener a sensation is repeated, the greater is the probability of its origin in reality. You saw me yesterday, and will see me to-morrow." He said: "I can see Williams to-morrow if I please. He told me that he was stopping at the Turk's Head Coffee-house, in the Strand, and should be there two days. I want to convince you that I am not under a delusion. Will you walk with me to London to-morrow, to see him?" I said: "I would most willingly do so." The next morning after an early breakfast we set off on our walk to London. We had got half way down Egham Hill, when he suddenly turned round, and said to me: "I do not think we shall find Williams at the Turk's Head." I said: "Neither do I." He said: "You say that, because you do not think he has been there; but he mentioned a contingency under which he might leave town yesterday, and he has probably done so." I said: "At any rate, we should know that he has been there." He said: "I will take other means of convincing you. I will write to him. Suppose we take a walk through the forest." We turned about on our new direction, and were out all day. Some days passed, and I heard no more of the matter. One morning he said to me: "I have some news of Williams; a letter and an enclosure." I said: "I shall be glad to see the letter." He said: "I cannot show you the letter; I will show you the enclosure. It is a diamond

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necklace. I think you know me well enough to be sure I would not throw away my own money on such a thing, and that if I have it, it must have been sent me by somebody else. It has been sent me by Williams." "For what purpose?" I asked. He said: "To prove his identity and his sincerity." "Surely," I said, "your showing me a diamond necklace will prove nothing but that you have one to show." "Then," he said, "I will not show it you. If you will not believe me, I must submit to your incredulity." There the matter ended. I never heard another word of Williams, nor of any other mysterious visitor. I had on one or two previous occasions argued with him against similar semi-delusions, and I believe if they had always been received with similar scepticism, they would not have been often repeated; but they were encouraged by the ready credulity with which they were received by many who ought to have known better. I call them semi-delusions, because for the most part, they had their basis in his firm belief that his father and uncle had designs on his liberty. On this basis his imagination built a fabric of romance, and when he presented it as substantive fact, and it was found to contain more or less of inconsistency, he felt his self-esteem interested in maintaining it by accumulated circumstances, which severally vanished under the touch of investigation, like Williams's location at the Turk's Head Coffee-house.

'I must add that, in the expression of these differences, there was not a shadow of anger. They were discussed with freedom and calmness; with the good temper and good feeling which never forsook him in conversations with his friends. There was an evident anxiety for acquiescence, but a quiet and gentle toleration of dissent.'

Delusions of persecution pursued Shelley to Italy. There is a story, which dates from 1818, of his having been knocked

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down in the post office at Florence by a man in a military cloak, who had suddenly walked up to him, saying: 'Are you the damned atheist Shelley?' This man was not seen by anyone else, nor ever afterwards seen or heard of; and Peacock classes this incident with the previous 'semi-delusions'. In 1822, the year of his death, the hallucinations recurred with unusual intensity. In June Shelley was busy writing *The Triumph of Life*. The composition of this poem, the perpetual presence of the sea, and other causes, relates Lady Shelley:

'contributed to plunge the mind of Shelley into a state of morbid excitement, the result of which was a tendency to see visions. One night loud cries were heard issuing from the saloon. The Williamses rushed out of their room in alarm; Mrs Shelley also endeavoured to reach the spot, but fainted at the door. Entering the saloon, the Williamses found Shelley staring horribly into the air, and evidently in a trance. They waked him, and he related that a figure wrapped in a mantle came to his bedside and beckoned him. He must then have risen in his sleep, for he followed the imaginary figure into the saloon, when it lifted the hood of its mantle, ejaculated "Siete sodisfatto?" and vanished.'

Another vision which occurred about this time is recorded by Williams in his diary published in Lady Shelley's *Shelley Memorials*:

'May 6. Fine. Some heavy drops of rain fell without a cloud being visible. After tea, while walking with Shelley on the terrace, and observing the effect of moonshine on the waters, he complained of being unusually nervous, and, stopping short, he grasped me violently by the arm, and stared steadfastly on the white surf that broke upon the beach under our feet. Observing him sensibly affected, I demanded of him if

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he was in pain; but he only answered by saying: "There it is again! there!" He recovered after some time, and declared that he saw, as plainly as he then saw me, a naked child (Allegra, who had recently died) rise from the sea, and clasp its hands as if in joy, smiling at him. This was a trance that it required some reasoning and philosophy entirely to wake him from, so forcibly had the vision operated on his mind.'

Still another vision occurred on June 6th. Shelley was heard screaming and when Williams went to the room, Shelley said he had not been asleep, had not screamed, but had seen Edward and Jane Williams come into the room, 'their bodies lacerated, their bones starting through their skin, their faces pale yet stained with blood; they could hardly walk, but Edward was the weakest, and Jane was supporting him. Edward said, "Get up, Shelley, the sea is flooding the house, and it is all coming down." Shelley got up, he thought, and went to his window that looked on the terrace and the sea, and thought he saw the sea rushing in. Suddenly his vision changed, and he saw the figure of himself strangling me; that made him rush into my room, yet, fearful of frightening me, he dared not approach the bed, when my jumping out awoke him, or, as he phrased it, caused his vision to vanish. All this was frightful enough, and talking it over the next morning, he told me that he had many visions lately; he had seen the figure of himself, which met him as he walked on the terrace and said to him, "How long do you mean to be content"?'¹

It is possible that these last two visions are of a somewhat different type from the rest, but the evidence as a whole is sufficient to establish the fact that Shelley was suffering, during the last ten years of his life (and therefore during the whole of his effective poetic period) from a well-established kind of

¹ From a letter from Mrs Shelley to Mrs Gisborne, August 15th, 1822, *Life and Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, by Mrs Julian Marshall (1889), ii, 11.

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psychosis,¹ the ‘paranoid’ type of dementia praecox. Any further description of this psychological abnormality is not necessary—its character is sufficiently evident in the case presented by Shelley. We must now investigate the possible cause of the psychosis, but first I must describe the other significant features in Shelley’s make-up.

Shelley’s first attempt to deal openly with the incest motive was made in 1817, when he wrote *Laon and Cythna*, the original version of *The Revolt of Islam*. The poem was actually set up, and a few copies printed, before the publisher, Ollier, discovered that the lovers Laon and Cythna were represented as brother and sister. He was horrified and hastily stopped the publication, and then insisted on the poem being amended. Shelley put up the strongest resistance, but Ollier remained firm, so finally Shelley submitted, and the poem, with a few changes of sex, appeared as *The Revolt of Islam*. Undismayed by this experience, Shelley two years later returned to the theme in *The Cenci*. As Shelley was at pains to point out, it was the facts of the story which interested him, and which he proposed to present, abating the horror in an idealization of the characters, without any attempt to make them ‘subservient to what is vulgarly termed a moral purpose’. For the present merely the fact that in two of his major works Shelley took incest as a motive is significant for our enquiry into his psychosis.

The third feature I mentioned, the general lack of objectivity in Shelley’s mode of self-expression, is one which has its poetic as well as its psychological interest. But for the moment I confine myself to the latter aspect. It is a commonplace observation that most people’s senses are unbalanced; one person will have keen visual sensibility, another keen aural sensibility; in others the sense of touch or smell will be

¹ In general I have preferred to use the term ‘psychosis’ rather than ‘neurosis’, following the distinction made by Freud. (*Collected Papers*, Vol. II.)

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developed at the expense of the rest of the senses. ‘When I first knew Shelley’, Hogg writes, ‘he was alike indifferent to all works of art. He learned afterwards to admire statues, and then, at a still later period, pictures; but he never had any feeling for the wonders of architecture; even our majestic cathedrals were viewed with indifference. I took him into York Minster several times, but to no purpose; it was thrown away, entirely lost upon him. The insensible Harriet appeared to feel its beauty, until her admiration of the sublime structure was proscribed and forbidden by authority.’ That Hogg was not in this matter in any way misrepresenting Shelley is shown by those very reactions to statues and pictures which Hogg refers to, and which still survive in Shelley’s letters from Italy, and in his ‘Critical Notices of the Sculpture in the Florence Gallery’. Most art criticism of the period is ‘literary’, but Shelley’s notes show a complete unawareness of anything in the nature of what we should now call plastic values. A passage from a letter to Leigh Hunt (Sept. 8th, 1918) will serve as an illustration:

‘Perhaps I attended more to sculpture than to painting, its forms being more easily intelligible than that of the latter. Yet, I saw the famous works of Raffaele, whom I agree with the whole world in thinking the finest painter. With respect to Michael Angelo I dissent, and think with astonishment and indignation of the common notion that he equals, and, in some respects, exceeds Raffaele. He seems to me to have no sense of moral dignity and loveliness; and the energy for which he has been so much praised, appears to me to be a certain rude, external, mechanical quality, in comparison with anything possessed by Raffaele, or even much inferior artists. His famous painting in the Sixtine Chapel seems to me deficient in beauty and majesty, both in the conception and the execution. He has been called the Dante of painting; but if

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we find some of the gross and strong outlines which are employed in the most distasteful passages of the *Inferno*, where shall we find *your* Francesca—where the spirit coming over the sea in a boat, like Mars rising from the vapours of the horizon—where Matilda gathering flowers, and all the exquisite tenderness, and sensibility, and ideal beauty, in which Dante excelled all poets except Shakespeare.'

In a letter to Peacock on the same subject, Shelley is even more outspoken about Michelangelo. 'He has not only no temperance, no modesty, no feeling for the just boundaries of art. . . . but he has no sense of beauty, and to want this is to want the sense of the creative power of mind.' The odd thing is, that Shelley accuses Michelangelo of lacking precisely those qualities which a modern critic would see in the sculptor: majesty, creative power, moral dignity, idealization of the human type. One cannot help feeling that some other quality in the artist repelled Shelley—perhaps his extreme masculinity, which Shelley designated as 'a certain rude, external, mechanical quality'; or perhaps still obscurer aspects of Michelangelo's homosexuality.

It happens that a certain modern psychological theory will account for all these features in Shelley's personality, and though this theory will meet with a good deal of resistance, particularly from friends of Shelley, and will therefore seem very inappropriate to a so-called defence of Shelley, I shall put it forward, since I believe that the knowledge which comes from a complete understanding of a poet's personality is the best basis for the appreciation of his poetry. For it is not a belief in the ideas or dogmas of a poet that is essential for the reader's poetic 'assent', but rather a sympathy with his personality; and this is the sense in which I wish to amend Mr Eliot's amendment of Dr Richards's amendment of Coleridge's original suggestion.

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The psychological theory I have in mind, known as ‘the principle of primary identification’, was first put forward by Dr Trigant Burrow in two papers contributed to *The Psycho-analytical Review*¹; there is an accessible discussion of it in Chapter XVI of Dr John T. MacCurdy’s *Problems in Dynamic Psychology*.² It is a theory which attempts to explain the origin of homosexual tendencies, and the consequences of the suppression of these tendencies, and as Dr MacCurdy says, ‘it is peculiarly significant that this, the most original and important contribution to psychoanalysis of recent years, has received no attention from Freud and his immediate followers.’ I cannot do better than quote the summary of this theory as given by MacCurdy:

‘While still *in utero*, the infant’s “organic consciousness is so harmoniously adapted to its environment as to constitute a perfect continuum with it”. The foetus has no knowledge of where he begins and the maternal envelope ends. He has no personality, no individuality, because these are the sum of consistent reactions to the environment which give the organism its psychic individuality or personality. Even for some months after birth the child is still without true individuality and, so far as consciousness is concerned, is still an extension of the mother, so to speak, for all his experience is gained through or with the mother.

‘“Now during these early months of the infant’s exclusive relationship with the mother, organic associations begin to be formed which mark the beginning of the awakening of consciousness. Let it be remembered though that since the child is still in the subjective, undifferentiated phase of consciousness,

¹ *The Genesis and Meaning of Homosexuality and its Relation to the Problem of Introverted Mental States* (Vol. 4, no. 3) and *The Origin of the Incest-Awe* (Vol. 5, no. 3).

² Cambridge University Press, 1923. Quoted with the kind permission of the Syndics.

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the associations of the first months of infantile life are entirely primary, subjective and unconscious, and that therefore its early associations, being subjective, non-conscious and undifferentiated, tend always toward the closer consolidation of the mother with itself, that is to say, they tend to the indissoluble welding together of the infantile ego and the mother-image. Thus is strengthened from day to day the mental union—the psychic amalgamation between the mother and infant which establishes for him an organic bond in respect to feeling or consciousness subsequent to birth that is correlative with the organic correspondence prior to their separation at birth. It is his subjective continuity—this organic mental bond—which I call the *principle of primary identification*.”

‘ . . . Such consciousness as [the infant] does enjoy is the subjective unity with his mother, hence his first efforts at objectivation follow the line of his mother’s solicitation, namely, himself. So he regards his own body as a love-object, just as does his mother. With weaning he is thrown more back upon himself and his body becomes the constant and insistent object of his interest. Thus auto-erotism. “Now auto-erotism or the love of one’s own body is the love of that sex to which one’s own body belongs and this, in psychological interpretation, is precisely homosexuality.”

‘ By this argument unconscious homosexuality is merely an extension into adult life of the primary identification, and a psychoneurosis a state of heightened subjectivity correlated with the unconscious homosexuality which is simply one expression of it.

‘ . . . [Burrow] proceeds to examine the “sentiment of love” and finds that it consists in identification with the love-object. It is not hard to find evidence of the existence of this factor and Burrow adduces many examples from the vocabulary of love to prove it. Normally the biological sex urge leads the individual to direct his love capacity, his identifica-

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tion tendency, to one of the opposite sex, but the neurotic is so dominated by the primary identification that he cannot do this and so tends to identify himself, unconsciously at least, with one like himself, i.e., he is homosexual.

'Unconscious homosexuality is thus merely incidental to the psychoneurosis. A much more fundamental problem is the origin of repression, without which one would not get all the distortions and evasions which constitute symptoms. Repression in general is typified in the horror, the revolt, against incest, so Burrow sets himself to the task of relating this to his principle of primary identification.'

This outline is perhaps sufficient for our purpose, but there are some detailed consequences of the theory which fit in with the case of Shelley. For example, in describing the process of adaptation, Dr Burrow explains how it comes about that some individuals, and precisely those who do not succeed in completely adapting themselves, will show a lack of objectivity.

'Now the demands of the world of outer objectivity or of consciousness proper entail increasing outrage to this state of primary quiescence. . . . Thus our primary nature shrinks from the intrusion of those outer impressions which disturb its elemental sleep. And so it may be said that *Nature abhors consciousness*. But with the increasing importunities of reality there begins the gradual increase of outer objective consciousness. Slowly there is the establishment of that *rapport* between the organism and the external world, which constitutes individual adaptation. Observe that the process of adaptation is essentially outward-tending, away from the ego, that it is inherently a process of objectivation.'

It would follow, therefore, that a poet who had not successfully adapted himself to the external world, who was, at least unconsciously, still firmly bound to that state of con-

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sciousness which succeeds the primary identification with the mother—who was, that is to say, unconsciously homosexual—would be distinguished by a lack of objectivity in his attitude towards the outer world, and in his description of that attitude, that is to say, in his poetic diction. And such is precisely the character of Shelley's poetry.

A psychologist would probably be inclined to ask for more specific evidence of unconscious homosexuality in the actual imagery used by Shelley. I think enough to satisfy the psychologist could be found in Shelley's works—abundantly in the two prose romances, for example, which were his first published works, and even in his most deliberate poems, such as *Adonais*.¹ But any such research I must leave to the psycholo-

¹ The symbol of the Eagle and the Serpent is a typical example of the kind of imagery that calls for some psychological explanation. It is used no less than four times by Shelley—in *Alastor*, II. 227–37; II. 324–5; *Prometheus Unbound* III, ii, 72–4; and with great elaboration in Canto I of *The Revolt of Islam*:

*For in the air do I behold indeed
An Eagle and a Serpent wreathed in fight:—
And now relaxing its impetuous flight,
Before the æreal rock on which I stood,
The Eagle, hovering, wheeled to left and right,
And hung with lingering wings over the flood,
And startled with its yells the wide air's solitude.*

*A shaft of light upon its wings descended,
And every golden feather gleamed therein—
Feather and scale, inextricably blended.
The Serpent's mailed and many-coloured skin
Shone through the plumes its coils were twined within
By many a swoln and knotted fold, and high
And far, the neck, receding lithe and thin,
Sustained a crested head, which warily
Shifted and glanced before the Eagle's steadfast eye.*

*Around, around, in ceaseless circles wheeling
With clang of wings and scream, the Eagle sailed
Incessantly—sometimes on high concealing
Its lessening orbs, sometimes as if it failed,
Drooped through the air; and still it shrieked and wailed,*

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gist. I would, however, like to point to the significance of a passage in one of Shelley's incompletely completed prose works, his *Speculations on Metaphysics*, the fifth section of which is an extraordinary anticipation of psychoanalysis. 'Let us reflect on our infancy', begins Shelley, 'and give as faithfully as possible a relation of the events of sleep.' And then he proceeds to give 'a faithful picture of my own peculiar nature relatively to sleep'.

*And casting back its eager head, with beak
And talon unremittingly assailed
The wreathèd Serpent, who did ever seek
Upon his enemy's heart a mortal wound to wreak.*

*. . . in the void air, far away,
Floated the shattered plumes; bright scales did leap,
Where'er the Eagle's talons made their way,
Like sparks into the darkness;—as they sweep,
Blood stains the snowy foam of the tumultuous deep.*

The description of the struggle continues for three more stanzas, and then the Eagle drops the Serpent, which falls to the sea, and makes its way to where a Woman, beautiful as morning, sits beneath the rocks. When the Woman sees the Serpent, she breaks into song—'his native tongue and hers'—

*And she unveiled her bosom, and the green
And glancing shadows of the sea did play
O'er its marmoreal depth:—one moment seen,
For ere the next, the Serpent did obey
Her voice, and, coiled in rest, in her embrace it lay.*

Possibly the psychologist will recognize in this imagery an archetypal pattern for which he has a ready interpretation—most probably some form of castration complex.¹ An eagle grasping a serpent is, of course, an emblem of fairly frequent occurrence; Mr Hugh Sykes Davies tells me that the image is used by Homer. It is possible, therefore, that Shelley consciously selected it; but what is of significance is not so much the selection of the image, as the extraordinary vividness and detail which it assumes in Shelley's relation. Those qualities, we may assume, had a powerful subconscious motivation; and since this passage is one of Shelley's high poetic achievements, we are entitled to look for psychological explanations of all hyperaesthetic expression. There could be no clearer justification, if any were needed, of the psychological method in literary criticism.

¹ Cf. *The Riddle of the Sphinx*, by Géza Róheim. (London: Hogarth Press, 1934.)

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'I distinctly remember dreaming three several times, between intervals of two or more years, the same precise dream. It was not so much what is ordinarily called a dream; the single image, unconnected with all other images, of a youth who was educated at the same school with myself, presented itself in sleep. Even now, after the lapse of many years, I can never hear the name of this youth, without the three places where I dreamed of him presenting themselves to my mind . . .

'I have beheld scenes, with the intimate and unaccountable connexion of which with the obscure parts of my own nature, I have been irresistibly impressed. I have beheld a scene which has produced no unusual effect on my thoughts. After the lapse of many years I have dreamed of this scene. It has hung on my memory, it has haunted my thoughts, at intervals, with the pertinacity of an object connected with human affections. I have visited this scene again. Neither the dream could be dissociated from the landscape, nor the landscape from the dream, nor feelings, such as neither singly could have awakened, from both. But the most remarkable event of this nature, which ever occurred to me, happened five years ago at Oxford. I was walking with a friend, in the neighbourhood of that city, engaged in earnest and interesting conversation. We suddenly turned the corner of a lane, and the view, which its high banks and hedges had concealed, presented itself. The view consisted of a windmill, standing in one among many plashy meadows, inclosed with stone walls; the irregular and broken ground, between the wall and the road on which we stood; a long low hill behind the windmill, and a grey covering of uniform cloud spread over the sky. It was that season when the last leaf had just fallen from the scant and stunted ash. The scene surely was a common scene; the season and the hour little calculated to *kindle lawless thought*; it was a tame uninteresting assemblage of objects, such as would drive the imagination for refuge in serious and sober talk, to the even-

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ing fireside, and the dessert of winter fruits and wine. The effect which it produced on me was not such as could have been expected. I suddenly remembered to have seen that exact scene in some dream of long . . .'

The account breaks off thus abruptly, and Shelley adds in a note:

'Here I was obliged to leave off, overcome by thrilling horror.'

We shall never know what 'thrilling horror', what 'lawless thought', was present in such vividness in Shelley's dream that he could not bring himself to relate the incident. We can only speculate that it was a scene connected with that 'horror' which had such a strong and inexplicable fascination for him—the horror of incest. Lest it be thought that a horror of incest would be inconsistent with the open treatment of the theme such as we get in *The Cenci*, here is a statement from MacCurdy, made without reference to Shelley, but in general reference to the kind of psychosis Shelley seems to have suffered from: 'According to Burrow's thesis, such an individual should have the greatest repugnance to incest and show the greatest capacity for "love". Yet he can entertain delusions of incest without evidence of any horror at the thought and is less capable of love, as that term is usually understood, than any other clinical type we know about.'

This brings us to the final evidence for assuming that Shelley lived in a state of heightened subjectivity due to his unconscious homosexuality—his attitude to love. We shall still rely on the psychology of Burrow, which provides us with a very satisfactory explanation of two types of love with which Shelley was much concerned. Love, in this psychology, is closely identified with that striving for unity which is the normal unconscious effort of the individual. In the individual who is fully adapted to his social environment, the normal

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individual who has completely repressed the desire for unity and can enter into objective sexual relations with another individual of the opposite sex on a basis of reciprocity and partnership. But in the case of the incompletely adapted individual, his essential subjectivity will demand a more generalized kind of unity, in which there is no separation of the individual from the world at large. Subjectivity implies a lack of interest in one's environment, and a consequent longing for community of thinking. To quote Burrow:

'It is but natural that having come suddenly into the franchise of consciousness, man should employ his liberty of action in the wanton aims of personal satisfaction, or in the tedious propitiations of vicarious conformities. But there is something deeper still, more native to man, than all this. It is expressed in the social merging of personalities into each other in the pursuit of the common good. It is that quality of man that ever goads him to search and strive to the utmost benefit of the race. It is this quality of harmoniousness and unity inherent in the social aims of man that is, it seems to me, the strongest principle of man's consciousness. This it is that men have called love. This, it seems to me, is the true affirmation of life and its prototype is the harmonious principle of the pre-conscious.'

That this theory corresponds in general to Shelley's attitude to the subject will be at once obvious. But the extraordinary completeness with which Shelley expresses the view that we should, according to our hypothesis, expect him to express, can only be demonstrated by further quotation. The *Epipsy-chidion* is, of course, the supreme expression of his philosophy, and there could be no better instance of how some understanding of the psychology of a poet can aid us to an appreciation of his poetry; and of how for the lack of such understanding so sensitive a reader of poetry as Mr Eliot can be

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'thoroughly gravelled'. The lines which troubled Mr Eliot and which he quotes in his lecture, restored to their proper order and the omitted lines added, are these:

*I never was attached to that great sect,
Whose doctrine is, that each one should select
Out of the crowd a mistress or a friend,
And all the rest, though fair and wise, commend
To cold oblivion, though it is the code
Of modern morals, and the beaten road
Which those poor slaves with weary footsteps tread,
Who travel to their home among the dead
By the broad highway of the world, and so
With one chained friend, perhaps a jealous foe,
The dreariest and the longest journey go.*

*True Love in this differs from gold and clay,
That to divide is not to take away.
Love is like understanding, that grows bright,
Gazing on many truths; 'tis like thy light,
Imagination! which from earth and sky,
And from the depths of human fantasy,
As from a thousand prisms and mirrors, fills
The Universe with glorious beams, and kills
Error, the worm, with many a sun-like arrow
Of its reverberated lightning. Narrow
The heart that loves, the brain that contemplates,
The life that wears, the spirit that creates
One object, and one form, and builds thereby
A sepulchre for its eternity.*

There is nothing, I would submit, in such a poetic statement, to gravel any unprejudiced reader; the doctrine is clear and coherent, and, as I am attempting to show, based on—indeed, a consequence of—psychological realities. The question of the 'normality' of these realities I will deal with presently; but

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first, to present Shelley's doctrine in all its clarity, we must look again at the prose statement he wrote in 1815:

'Thou demandest what is love? It is that powerful attraction towards all that we conceive, or fear, or hope beyond ourselves, when we find within our own thoughts the chasm of an insufficient void, and seek to awaken in all things that are, a community with what we experience within ourselves. If we reason, we would be understood; if we imagine, we would that the airy children of our brain were born anew within another's; if we feel, we would that another's nerves should vibrate to our own, that the beams of their eyes should kindle at once and mix and melt into our own, that lips of motionless ice should not reply to lips quivering and burning with the heart's best blood. This is Love. This is the bond and the sanction which connects not only man with man, but with everything which exists. We are born into the world, and there is something within us which, from the instant that we live, more and more thirsts after its likeness. It is probably in correspondence with this law that the infant drains milk from the bosom of its mother; this propensity develops itself with the development of our nature. We dimly see within our intellectual nature a miniature as it were of our entire self, yet deprived of all that we condemn or despise, the ideal prototype of everything excellent or lovely that we are capable of conceiving as belonging to the nature of man. Not only the portrait of our external being, but an assemblage of the minutest particles of which our nature is composed¹; a mirror whose surface reflects only the forms of purity and brightness; a soul within our soul that describes a circle around its proper paradise, which pain, and sorrow, and evil dare not overleap. To this we eagerly refer all sensations, thirsting that they should resemble or correspond with it. The discovery of

¹ These words are ineffectual and metaphorical. Most words are so—No help! (Shelley's note.)

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its antitype; the meeting with an understanding capable of clearly estimating our own; an imagination which should enter into and seize upon the subtle and delicate peculiarities which we have delighted to cherish and unfold in secret; with a frame whose nerves, like the chords of two exquisite lyres, strung to the accompaniment of one delightful voice, vibrate with the vibrations of our own; and of a combination of all these in such proportion as the type within demands; this is the invisible and unattainable point to which Love tends; and to attain which, it urges forth the powers of man to arrest the faintest shadow of that, without the possession of which there is no rest nor respite to the heart over which it rules.'

Here, in language which only differs from a modern psychologist's in being poetic rather than technical, we have a clear description of the state of narcissism, that stage in the development of the individual when a growing self-consciousness becomes a growing self-love. Physically this state may be expressed in auto-erotic practices, but it can exist without auto-erotism, in fantasy alone. The clearest expression of this narcissistic attitude in Shelley's poetry (as Professor James Sutherland has pointed out to me) is in *Alastor*. I have already referred to the general theme of the poem, as outlined by Shelley in his Preface; it is the search for a 'prototype' (Shelley's word) who would make real or concrete his ideal conception of 'all that is excellent and majestic'. In the poem the Poet finds 'a veiled maid' in 'the wild Carmanian waste' whose voice 'was like the voice of his own soul', and the music of it 'held his inmost sense suspended in its web' (ll. 140-91). This is the 'antitype' of the passage quoted above, and the scene of their merger or identification, as described by Shelley in the poem, is not without erotic significance:

*Sudden she rose,
As if her heart impatiently endured*

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*Its bursting burthen: at the sound he turned,
And saw by the warm light of their own life
Her glowing limbs beneath the sinuous veil
Of woven wind, her outspread arms now bare,
Her dark locks floating in the breath of night,
Her beamy bending eyes, her parted lips
Outstretched, and pale, and quivering eagerly.
His strong heart sunk and sickened with excess
Of love. He reared his shuddering limbs and quelled
His gasping breath, and spread his arms to meet
Her panting bosom: . . . she drew back a while,
Then, yielding to the irresistible joy,
With frantic gesture and short breathless cry
Folded his frame in her dissolving arms.
Now blackness veiled his dizzy eyes, and night
Involved and swallowed up the vision; sleep,
Like a dark flood suspended in its course,
Rolled back its impulse on his vacant brain.*

From narcissism the individual develops towards homosexuality (love of another like oneself) or towards heterosexuality, where objectivity may be completely developed. But, in Dr MacCurdy's words, 'very frequently the alleged object of love is merely a lay figure; the subject is in love with his ideal of what the loved one should be. In such a case the union is happy just in so far as the object of attachment is capable of identifying himself or herself with the ideal. This type of love is narcissistic because what is loved is not another person at all but an autochthonous ideal. True objectivity occurs only when another person is loved as another personality and not only in so far as the object duplicates a fantasy of the lover. When a sexual object is credited with undue virtue (sexual overestimation), this is a product of narcissism, because the qualities in question do not reside in the object (or

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not in the degree represented) but are fantasies of the lover, things he would like to see and, therefore, does observe. Such an attachment may pass for true love, thanks to its loud protestations, but it is unstable. A puff of reality will blow it away.' It will at once be obvious how closely Shelley's love affairs correspond to this description. Not only in his explicit ideas, as expressed in his poetry, but also in the actions of his life, he reveals himself as a narcissistic type.

This, I think, is about as far as the literary critic can carry the psychological analysis of a poet. It has enabled us to establish beyond any reasonable doubt that Shelley belonged to a definite psychological type—a type whose consciousness is incompletely objectified, which is therefore evidently narcissistic, and unconsciously homosexual. Such unconscious homosexuality gives rise to a psychosis of which Shelley shows all the normal symptoms. It determines a line of moral conduct which Shelley exhibits in his life. It determines a quality of imagery and verbal expression which is present in Shelley's verse. It has as its concomitant a unity-complex which leads to the development of those social ideas of an anarchist tendency which are characteristic of Shelley's political thought. The chain of evidence is complete; it does not, so far as I can see, leave any room for argument.

But what still remains to be done is to give some estimate of the value of such a type. And by 'value' I mean the worth of such an individual to the social and intellectual life of the community at large. For it cannot be assumed that what is not normal is not valuable.

[iv]

Gibt es vielleicht—eine Frage für Irrenärzte—Neurosen der Gesundheit?

NIETZSCHE

One thing which modern psychology may claim to have established beyond question is the relativity of all human

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types; at least, the psychologist will tell you that any pre-conceived idea of normality will break down on the most superficial analysis. Dr Burrow has called normality 'unconsciousness on a co-operative basis', and he for one is not deceived by the compromise it represents. But if not a reality in any absolute sense, this co-operative basis is an accepted fiction or illusion from which the neurotic finds himself excluded. The values of the actual situation are majority values—the conventional values of morality, conduct and taste. There is no evidence whatever that such values are, in any positive sense, biological or organic values—by which I mean values which promote the health and happiness of mankind in the only world of which we have any certain knowledge. If one is strong enough to detach one's self from the normal assumptions of society (thereby becoming, if only for the moment, neurotic¹), then what, we may ask ourselves, is the value of this normal man—this man who has lost the joy of his childhood; this man who, clad in the triple armour of routine, convention and cant, goes through the paces of his hypocritical day; rising from a sleep in which the baffled forces of life have flickered phantasmagorically behind the screen of consciousness; immediately assuming the common mask, a shaven mask to which adheres, perhaps, a rudimentary whisker; then, having bathed and eased himself in shame-faced privacy, pursuing his daily course, donning his dull traditional clothing, fastening his senseless buttons, his starched collar, his polished boots; greeting his friends with his usual grin; this pipe-sucking busybody, reading his newspaper which panders ful-

¹ Cf. Shelley:

in truth I think

*Her gentleness and patience and sad smiles,
And that she did not die, but lived to tend
Her aged father, were a kind of madness,
If madness 'tis to be unlike the world.*

'The Sunset', a fragment of a poem written in 1816.

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somely to his unconscious sadism, his repressed homosexuality, his all-pervasive eroticism—need we follow him through the whole round of his visits, avocations and amusements? (Little man, he's had a busy day!) Not one moment of unchecked spontaneity, of whole-hearted participation in a life free, communal and unconfined. Everywhere the taboo, the code, the eternal vigilance of the unknown censor.

Against this mass self-deception, the neurotic is doomed to protest. It may be that in the process of his individual adaptation to life, his growth has been arrested; he has not, that is to say, completely dissociated himself from his original organic unity with his mother. He has not been fully weaned, he has not been completely *won* for society. Forcibly divorced from his mother, all the strength of his feeling has been transferred to the object of his mother's greatest regard—to himself. Social adaptation consists precisely in getting rid of this self-interest, this autosexuality; in sublimating it, as we say. But such adaptation is really a pretence; under the cover of our conventions we remain disparate, dissociated, resisting the organic wholeness of life. Only the neurotic refuses the compromise. Disparate as he may seem from the point of view of the normality we have achieved, actually he is nearer the source of life, the organic reality; his separateness is really an integrity of personality, an agreement of all the instinctive and affective life of the individual with the organic processes of life in general (the natural unity of our common life). 'If the neurotic regarded individually, or as the embodiment within himself of a societal lesion', writes Dr Burrow, 'is an expression of separatism and pathology, the neurotic viewed organically, or as the embodiment within himself of the societal continuum, is no less an expression of confluence and health. If, in the first instance, he is himself the disorder that is his own separatism and unconsciousness, in the second he is the integration that is his own confluence and consciousness.'

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It is this constructive aspect of the neuroses of which we have not yet taken account and of which we may take due cognizance only upon the basis of a wider, organicistic interpretation of these disorders of the personality.¹

Our next step is to correlate, from this point of view, the neurotic and the artist. Actually this has already been done by Dr Burrow. 'The organic integrity of personality that is the composite life of man and that is organically inseparable from the unifying urge embodied in the impulse of mating, has its clearest intimations in the affirmations of the artist as in the frustrations of the neurotic.' The artist, that is to say, reveals an inward unity and concentration of personality in marked contrast with the extraneous dissipations and diversities of the average reaction-type: 'It is this unity of personality that is the source of the artist's creativeness as it is the inspiration of his genius. This composite quality of the sex life explains the gentler intuitions we often find in the personality of a man. There is undoubtedly the feminine in man though as yet he stands in fear of it. It does not wrangle or contend. It does not calculate success. The feminine in man is the artist in man.'² It is because of this that there can be in the societal unity of the artist's intuitive instinct no place for the illusion that is called "the public". To him "the public" is but the collective repudiation of the common soul of man—a repudiation that corresponds to this same disavowal within the private soul of each of us. Unmoved by its clamorous demands, the artist feels within these manifestations of the public mind the common soul that underlies it, and senses within it the pain of denied needs identical with his own. This is the unfailing intuition of the artist.³

¹ *The Social Basis of Unconsciousness*, p. 153.

² Cf. Gerard Manley Hopkins: '... the things must come from the *mundus muliebris*'.

³ *Op. cit.*, pp. 218-9.

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The relevance of these distinctions to the case of Shelley will by now be evident. But before returning to Shelley I would like to refer to my previous discussion, in *Form in Modern Poetry*, of the distinction between personality and character in relation to the poetic process. When I wrote that essay I had not read any of Dr Burrow's works; I was elaborating certain statements of Keats's, and in so far as I was going beyond my own experience, I was relying on my understanding of Freud. I feel now that the truth I was attempting to formulate is amply confirmed by Dr Burrow (who was trained in the Freudian school) and given a more scientific basis. Literary critics like Mr Eliot may refuse to be drawn into this discussion,¹ but it should now be obvious that such an attitude is merely an avoidance of the essential issue for modern criticism.

To return to Shelley. From the pathological point of view, Shelley was a neurotic, in conflict with the social imposition of normality. But from a more general and human point of view, Shelley was a genius whose neurotic reaction, for all its distortion, represents an organic urge towards 'a completer oneness of life', 'a clearer, more conscious social order'. As much might be said of other poets—of Keats, for example. But just as, in Burrow's words, 'it is the distinction of the neurotic personality that he is at least consciously and confessedly *nervous*', so the special value of Shelley is that he was conscious of his direction; he had, in the modern sense, but without expressing himself in modern terminology, analysed his own neurosis. He did not *define* his autosexuality; but he allowed the reaction full scope. That is to say, he allowed his feelings and ideas to develop integrally with his neurotic personality; and the élan of that evolution inevitably led to the formulation of 'a clearer, more conscious social order'.

¹ 'Mr Herbert Read . . . pursues his speculations to a point to which I would not willingly follow him.' *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, p. 101 n.

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In the light of this analysis, therefore, we must reconsider those 'shabby ideas' of his. For not for the first time in the history of human thought, the stone which the builders rejected may become the head of the corner.

[v]

It is not part of my intention in this essay to give any extensive account of Shelley's political and moral ideas; that has been done before, notably by Mr John Shawcross in his *Introduction to a selection of Shelley's Literary and Philosophical Criticism* published in the Oxford Miscellany in 1909 and, in greater detail, by Professor Carl Grabo.¹ But it is necessary to say something in answer to the charge of incoherence, for that, as we have seen, is the main clause in Mr Eliot's indictment.

Any intelligent mind, during the period of development or formation (a period which, in the most intelligent minds, lasts as long as life), is open to two kinds of influence. One is immediate, and is concerned with the temporary problems of the age we live in; the other is less urgent but more enduring, and is concerned with the permanent problems of human destiny. It is possible to adopt a superior attitude, and say that all the problems that matter were solved once and for all time by Aristotle, or by St Thomas, or by Kant; and that all we need do at any particular stage of history is to apply the eternal principles of one or other of these philosophers. It is a possible attitude but not a very helpful one; it involves the dogmatist in casuistry, for the immediate problems in life are not necessarily the permanent ones. In our own day we shall look in vain to the past for any solution of the peculiar problems, ethical as well as economic, introduced into our society by modern industrial and scientific methods of production.

¹ *The Magic Plant: the Growth of Shelley's Thought*. University of North Carolina Press (Chapel Hill), 1936.

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We are likely to find more guidance in the works of Freud and Marx. It would be equally foolish to seek the source of all wisdom in contemporary philosophers, for wisdom, unfortunately, is not cumulative. It is an insight given to but few individuals in the course of history; and when not faced by new factors, we do well to hold on to the truths tested by universal experience.

From the point of view of the present day, all this is very obvious, if not platitudinous. But when we are considering a poet of another age, such as Shelley, we do not necessarily bear this distinction in mind. We can, if we are not sympathetic, judge him by his immediate influences—the enthusiasms called forth by the urgent problems of his age—and ignore the fact that he was equally influenced by forces we readily accept as valid for all time. The only legitimate demand we might make, perhaps, is that the contemporary enthusiasms should not be the only enthusiasms. We justly suspect the mind that feeds exclusively on a diet of raw opinions. We demand balance, if not consistency. But no one, so far as I am aware (certainly none of the critics I have mentioned), has demonstrated even the inconsistency of Shelley's views. There has been plenty of vague assertion, inspired by prejudice, but no proof.

We can trace Shelley's intellectual development with fair ease. He himself, in one of his early letters to Godwin (June 3, 1812), gives us a somewhat picturesque summary: 'Until my marriage, my life had been a series of illness; as it was of a nervous and spasmodic nature, it in a degree incapacitated me for study. I nevertheless, in the intervals of comparative health, read romances, and those the most marvellous ones, unremittingly, and pored over the reveries of Albertus Magnus and Paracelsus, the former of which I read in Latin, and probably gained more knowledge of that language from that source than from all the discipline of Eton. My fondness for

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natural magic and ghosts abated as my age increased. I read Locke, Hume, Reid, and whatever metaphysics came in my way, without, however, renouncing poetry, an attachment to which has characterized all my wanderings and changes. I did not truly *think* and *feel*, however, until I read *Political Justice*, though my thought and feelings, after this period, have been more painful, anxious, and vivid—more inclined to action and less to theory. Before I was a republican: Athens appeared to me the model of government; but afterwards, Athens bore in my mind the same relation to perfection that Great Britain did to Athens.' At Oxford (1810–11), we learn from Hogg, Hume's *Essays* was his favourite book; he also studied Locke with great care, and also 'certain popular French works that treat of man, for the most part in a mixed method, metaphysically, morally, and politically'. It was then that he began to read Plato, and 'was vehemently excited by the striking doctrines which Socrates unfolds'. From then onwards he read Greek continuously, and became very proficient in the language. 'Few were aware', says Hogg, 'of the extent, and still fewer of the profundity of his reading; in his short life, and without ostentation he had, in truth, read more Greek than many an aged pedant. . . . A pocket edition of Plato, of Plutarch, of Euripides, without interpretation or notes, or of the Septuagint, was his ordinary companion; and he read the text straightforward for hours, if not as readily as an English author, at least with as much facility as French, Italian, or Spanish.' During the last four years of his life, during the time he was writing his greatest poetry, he read Homer and Plato, Dante and Ariosto, Calderon and Goethe; he read them with contiguous pleasure and deep understanding, and from these authors, if from any, he borrowed his 'shabby' ideas.

We might arrange his precursors in three groups: first Plato and other classical writers, such as Lucretius; then the

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philosophers of the Enlightenment, Locke and Hume, and their more platonic counterparts, Berkeley and Spinoza; and finally that school of philosophical radicalism which begins with Rousseau, includes Helvétius and Condorcet, and ends for Shelley with Godwin. It is possible to say that here we have mutually exclusive elements; there is little sympathy between Plato and Locke, for example. But we are not to imagine that Shelley accepted all these philosophers in equal measure. Plato was his touchstone, and to Plato he could assimilate what was most sympathetic in the others. But he was guided, of course, by his own intuition of the truth. ‘As a poet and artist’, Mr Shawcross very rightly observes, ‘Shelley is essentially a lover of order; in order he sees the principle of beauty, whether expressed in sensuous form or civic institution. It is against defective institutions that his attack on society is aimed—defective, because they fail to reflect outwardly the inner moral law.’

A captious critic might complain that the phrase I have used, ‘his intuition of the truth’, begs the question of coherence, but I should be willing if necessary to explain such a phrase in psychological terms. For my principle all the time is that an individual’s coherence of thought is a reflection of his coherent personality—by which, of course, I do not mean a consistent character. We build our philosophy, our ‘view of life’, round our psychic elements—round our experience, if a plainer but a vaguer expression is preferred. Even Mr Shawcross, who is innocent of my psychology, notes that ‘no doubt in Shelley’s aversion from the concrete and the complex we must seek an explanation of the remarkable influence which Godwin’s writings exercised upon him’. In the same psychological facts we must seek an explanation of Plato’s influence upon him. We may only be distinguishing between two kinds of philosophy, or, as Shelley expresses it in the first paragraph already quoted from *A Defence of Poetry*, between

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reason and imagination; but there is absolutely no necessity to regard one kind of logic or consistency (the consistency of a system within itself, the parts with the whole) as infallible, and preferable to another kind of logic (the consistency of a system as an interpretation of the materials of human nature and life). The first may be science and the second allegory; but both may be equally coherent, mature, and founded on the facts of experience.

The precise terms of Shelley's 'view of life' are never in doubt. That view may be idealistic, humanitarian and radical, but it is expressed, both in prose and verse, with a clarity which is not normally associated with a muddled mind. The notes to *Queen Mab*, the work of a youth of eighteen, are admirable in style, and show a mastery of exposition and dialectic which would be hard to match among the intellectual prodigies of the world. They deal with a dizzy range of subjects—astronomy, militarism, the labour theory of value, prostitution, the doctrine of necessity, atheism, Christian evidence, time, and vegetarianism. But however diverse the subjects, they are illuminated from one centre: a mind and personality of singular energy, purity and compassion. It was a mind, moreover, that was continually expanding and enriching itself; and in the twelve years which were all that followed the writing of *Queen Mab*, the progress is all in the direction of depth and maturity. I have already paid my tribute to the philosophical merit of the *Defence*; other prose works are fragmentary, but none is despicable. Even the Irish tracts, which are not often referred to, are good polemical writing; the speculations on metaphysics and on morals, and the 'Essay on Christianity', are not to be considered as anything but random and interrupted efforts, but they are acute and at times even eloquent. But the best of his philosophy is contained, of course, in his great poems, particularly in *Prometheus Unbound*, *Epipsychedion* and *Adonais*. In these, abstract thought

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finds such sensuous and harmonious expression as only Wordsworth rarely rivals, and only Dante frequently excels; there

*Language is a perpetual Orphic song,
Which rules with Daedal harmony a throng
Of thoughts and forms, which else senseless and shapeless were.*

The particular poetic quality which results from this perfect fusion of thought and feeling we will examine presently; for the moment I am only concerned to defend these poems as the expression of a coherent philosophy or ‘view of life’. That philosophy Shelley embodied in the myth of Prometheus—the hero of humanity struggling against the tyranny of ignorance and superstition. Demogorgon’s final benediction is too well known to quote, and even hostile critics submit to its supreme poetic power. But the eminence of those verses should not distract us from the more central exposition—Prometheus’s speeches towards the end of Act I, for example, and Asia’s cosmic vision in Act II, Scene iv, which I will quote:

*There was the Heaven and Earth at first,
And Light and Love; then Saturn, from whose throne
Time fell, an envious shadow: such the state
Of the earth’s primal spirits beneath his sway,
As the calm joy of flowers and living leaves
Before the wind or sun has withered them
And semivital worms; but he refused
The birthright of their being, knowledge, power,
The skill which yields the elements, the thought
Which pierces this dim universe like light,
Self-empire, and the majesty of love;
For thirst of which they fainted. Then Prometheus
Gave wisdom, which is strength, to Jupiter,
And with this law alone, ‘Let man be free’,
Clothed him with the dominion of wide Heaven.*

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To know nor faith, nor love, nor law; to be
Omnipotent but friendless is to reign;
And Jove now reigned; for on the race of man
First famine, and then toil, and then disease,
Strife, wounds, and ghastly death unseen before,
Fell; and the unseasonable seasons drove
With alternating shafts of frost and fire,
Their shelterless, pale tribes to mountain caves:
And in their desert hearts fierce wants he sent,
And mad disquietudes, and shadows idle
Of unreal good, which levied mutual war,
So ruining the lair wherein they raged.
Prometheus saw, and waked the legioned hopes
Which sleep within folded Elysian flowers,
Nepenthe, Moly, Amaranth, fadeless blooms,
That they might hide with thin and rainbow wings
The shape of Death; and Love he sent to bind
The disunited tendrils of that vine
Which bears the wine of life, the human heart;
And he tamed fire which, like some beast of prey,
Most terrible, but lovely, played beneath
The frown of man; and tortured to his will
Iron and gold, the slaves and signs of power,
And gems and poisons, and all subtlest forms
Hidden beneath the mountains and the waves.
He gave man speech, and speech created thought,
Which is the measure of the universe;
And Science struck the thrones of earth and heaven,
Which shook, but fell not; and the harmonious mind
Poured itself forth in all-prophetic song;
And music lifted up the listening spirit
Until it walked, exempt from mortal care,
Godlike, o'er the clear billows of sweet sound;
And human hands first mimicked and then mocked,

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*With moulded limbs more lovely than its own,
The human form, till marble grew divine;
And mothers, gazing, drank the love men see
Reflected in their race, behold, and perish.
He told the hidden power of herbs and springs,
And Disease drank and slept. Death grew like sleep.
He taught the implicated orbits woven
Of the wide-wandering stars; and how the sun
Changes his lair, and by what secret spell
The pale moon is transformed, when her broad eye
Gazes not on the interlunar sea:
He taught to rule, as life directs the limbs,
The tempest-wingèd chariots of the Ocean,
And the Celt knew the Indian. Cities then
Were built, and through their snow-like columns flowed
The warm winds, and the azure aether shone,
And the blue sea and shadowy hills were seen.
Such, the alleviations of his state,
Prometheus gave to man, for which he hangs
Withering in destined pain....*

This is the broadcloth of Shelley's verse, and better to be appreciated in the piece than in the pattern. Against its even goodness the songs and lyrics throw out their lustre. Shelley called this poem a lyrical drama; but actually it is an epic, the greatest expression ever given to humanity's desire for intellectual light and spiritual liberty. The hundred years since it was written is but a very short time in the history of that long effort, and the day may yet come when this poem will take its commanding place in a literature of freedom of which we have yet no conception.

I must not, however, end this section of my argument on a vague exultant note. The riposte must reach its mark. 'We may be permitted to infer,' Mr Eliot says, 'in so far as the dis-

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taste of a person like myself for Shelley's poetry is not attributable to irrelevant prejudices or to a simple blind spot, but is due to a peculiarity in the poetry and not in the reader, that it is not the presentation of beliefs which I do not hold, or—to put the case as extremely as possible—of beliefs which excite my abhorrence, that makes the difficulty. Still less is it that Shelley is deliberately making use of his poetic gifts to propagate a doctrine; for Dante and Lucretius did the same thing. I suggest that the position is somewhat as follows.¹ And then follows the charge of incoherence, immaturity, childishness, feebleness and shabbiness. But we cannot accept the suggestion (and it is only a suggestion: there is no demonstration). On the contrary, we affirm that Shelley's ideas were no more shabby and incoherent than those of Plato who was their chief inspiration; and that in so far as they were unplatonic, they showed a close parallel to the ideas of Lucretius, whom Mr Eliot accepts. Retracing the steps of his inference, we must come to the conclusion that Mr Eliot's objection to Shelley's poetry is irrelevant prejudice (for 'a simple blind spot' would not excite abhorrence); and such, I would suggest, is the kind of poetic approach of all who believe, with Mr Eliot, that 'literary criticism should be completed by criticism from a definite ethical and theological standpoint'.¹ I do not deny that such criticism may have its interest; but the only kind of criticism which is basic, and therefore complementary not only to technical exegesis but also to ethical, theological, philosophical and every other kind of ideological criticism, is ontogenetic criticism, by which I mean criticism which traces the origins of the work of art in the psychology of the individual and in the economic structure of society.

¹ 'Religion and Literature', by T. S. Eliot. An essay contributed to *Faith that Illuminates*, edited by V. A. Demant, London, 1935.

Shelley's central doctrine—I mean his doctrine of art and morality—is one of more than abstract philosophical interest; it is bound up with the texture of his poetry and the conduct of his life. The principle is simply one of identification; there is no question of the moral value of poetry because poetry and morality proceed from the same source. The functions of the poetical faculty are twofold; by one it creates new materials of knowledge and power and pleasure; by the other it engenders in the mind a desire to reproduce and arrange them according to a certain rhythm and order which may be called the beautiful and the good.' As thus stated, the identity might seem to be merely one of hedonist and aesthetic values; but Shelley's real meaning is much profounder. The following passage from *A Defence of Poetry* is a famous one, much quoted, but it should be re-read in the present context:

'Ethical science arranges the elements which poetry has created, and propounds schemes and proposes examples of civil and domestic life: nor is it for want of admirable doctrines that men hate, and despise, and censure, and deceive, and subjugate one another. But poetry acts in another and diviner manner. It awakens and enlarges the mind itself by rendering it the receptacle of a thousand unapprehended combinations of thought. Poetry lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world, and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar; it reproduces all that it represents, and the impersonations clothed in its Elysian light stand thence-forward in the minds of those who have once contemplated them, as memorials of that gentle and exalted content which extends itself over all thoughts and actions with which it co-exists. The great secret of morals is love; or a going out of our own nature, and an identification of ourselves with the

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beautiful which exists in thought, action, or persons, not our own. A man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own. The great instrument of moral good is the imagination; and poetry administers to the effect by acting upon the cause.'

We should note, in the first place, how closely this doctrine can be related to the modern psychological doctrine already imparted. 'Abstract truths are the personal relics of genius; their vindication in the concrete text of experience is the heritage of our common consciousness. . . . The source of genius is nuclear, original, essential. Moving amid the surface crusts of "types" which in their restriction of outer contact may only absorb or reflect the impressions about them, genius eradiates from the common centre of our societal organism sustained by an impulse that is cosmic. For this reason, it is the unalterable sentence of genius that it break with every accustomed adherence. It is its law that it raise itself out of habitual inertias and see straight and clear beyond all temporary immediacies, into the unfurbished truth of things.' When Dr Burrow writes like this, he is merely repeating, in very different language, the truth which Shelley expressed with a more direct poetic intuition.

Expressed in these general terms, the moral aspect of Shelley's doctrine might seem harmless enough; 'the great secret of morals is love'—that may be taken as the central tenet in Shelley's philosophy, and his greatest poems are illustrations of its truth—illustrations rather than demonstrations, for Shelley had a horror of didactic poetry. The 'bold neglect of a direct moral purpose', he wrote, 'is the most decisive proof of the supremacy of Milton's genius'. Shelley's aim in all his poems is to administer to the effect by acting upon the

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cause—by which he means inducing in his audience a state of sympathetic response to the actions depicted in poetry. ‘The imagination is enlarged by a sympathy with pains and passions so mighty, that they distend in their conception the capacity of that by which they are conceived; the good affections are strengthened by pity, indignation, terror, and sorrow; and an exalted calm is prolonged from the satiety of this high exercise of them into the tumult of familiar life; even crime is disarmed of half its horror and all its contagion by being represented as the fatal consequences of the unfathomable agencies of nature; error is thus divested of its wilfulness; men can no longer cherish it as the creation of their choice.’ Or, as he otherwise expressed the same idea in his Preface to *The Cenci*: ‘The highest moral purpose aimed at in the higher species of the drama, is the teaching the human heart, through its sympathies and antipathies, the knowledge of itself; in proportion to the possession of which knowledge, every human being is wise, just, sincere, tolerant and kind.’ In this light we should receive a dramatic creation such as the figure of Beatrice; for, as he says, ‘imagination is as the immortal God which should assume flesh for the redemption of mortal passion’. The significance of *The Cenci*, then, lies in the fact that Shelley wrote it without any didactic or philosophical purpose. He wished to illustrate, in the figure of Beatrice, that greatness of character is created by constancy in love, and he knew that this could be done only in dramatic action.

It may seem that Shelley’s philosophy remains on a moral, even a mundane, plane, and does not attempt to answer those profounder metaphysical questions to which Coleridge and Wordsworth addressed themselves. But this is not true: the unfinished ‘Triumph of Life’ ends with the question ‘What is life?’ and it was a question of which Shelley was continuously conscious. And he did provide an answer. That love, which

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he declared the secret of morals, he also regarded as the guiding principle of the universe. Again, he was following Plato, and, more particularly, Dante. In the detail of his conception he is much nearer to Dante than to Plato, but as a confessed atheist he did not want to identify this ‘unseen Power’ with a divine agency. He therefore gives it an ‘awful throne . . . in the wise heart’, from which it springs to fold over the world its healing wings. This universal love is clearly and defiantly humanistic in character; its ‘spells’ are faculties within the titanic frame of man’s imagination. In order to be

Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free

it is necessary

*To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite;
To forgive wrongs darker than death or night;
To defy Power, which seems omnipotent;
To love, and bear; to hope till Hope creates
From its own wreck the thing it contemplates;
Neither to change, nor falter, nor repent.*

These are Stoic virtues, human aspirations, and I see no evidence anywhere in Shelley’s work which would justify any more transcendental faith. At the end of *Adonais* he writes:

*From the world’s bitter wind
Seek Shelter in the shadow of the tomb.*

And though he uses words like ‘Heaven’ and ‘Eternity’, it is always in a metaphorical sense: they are attributes of the One, absolute, denied to the Many.

*The One remains, the many change and pass;
Heaven’s light forever shines, Earth’s shadows fly;
Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
Stains the white radiance of Eternity,
Until Death tramples it to fragments.*

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Resolute words, among the most immortal in our language; and they are followed by the relentless command:

*Die,
If thou wouldest be with that which thou dost seek.
Follow where all is fled!*

‘That which thou dost seek’ is identified with the Spirit of Beauty:

*That Light whose smile kindles the Universe,
That Beauty in which all things work and move,
That Benediction which the eclipsing Curse
Of birth can quench not, that sustaining Love
Which through the web of being blindly wove
By man and beast and earth and air and sea,
Burns bright or dim, as each are mirrors of
The fire for which all thirst . . .*

A fire, a white radiance, a transfused glory, a plastic stress, the splendours of the firmament of time—Shelley uses many such phrases to describe the immanent Spirit of the Universe, the ultimate Reality. They are concepts of the imagination, remote from revealed religion, but implying an endless resonance of love, beauty, and delight.

Shelley was one of those uncomfortable idealists who practise what they preach, and it is precisely the practical results of this doctrine from which the timid or the formal moralist recoils in horror or disdain. ‘Bête! ‘sale!’ cries Matthew Arnold. ‘Blackguard!’ cries Mr Eliot. It is true that there was in his own day another voice that cried: ‘You were all brutally mistaken about Shelley, who was, without exception, the best and least selfish man I ever knew. I never knew one who was not a beast in comparison.’¹ But that was the voice of one who, though he had been stretched on the rack of ex-

¹ Byron, in a letter to John Murray, August 3, 1822.

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perience till he touched the extremes of iniquity and glory, and so should speak with profound authority, is admittedly not apt to quell a doctrinaire. There have been others who have forgiven Shelley out of their Christian sympathy, and a few who have dared to imply that a poet of such divine genius is above human laws. But none has attempted to justify Shelley in reason, and on the basis of psychological truth. That, however, is a task which may be attempted with the aid of those psychological considerations which I have brought forward.

¶The crux of the question is, of course, Shelley's treatment of his first wife, Harriet. If Shelley had not so defiantly deserted her, if he had not so defiantly committed adultery with Mary Godwin, if the consequences of his action had not been so tragic, we should not have had so much righteous indignation about his character and conduct. Shelley's morals would have been confined to a polite essay and to his poetry, and we should have been free to admire the man and his work without distraction. But Shelley sinned against the most sacred clause in the social code of his time, and as a result has been vilified as a person and depreciated as a poet.

Until a few years ago, such judgments were made on a very incomplete knowledge of the facts. It was not until Dr Leslie Hotson discovered and published Shelley's letters to Harriet written at the time of his parting from her that the full evidence was made available. Dr Hotson has marshalled that evidence, and presented it with a scholarly detachment from which emerges, on the facts simply, and all idealistic justification apart, a far more favourable view of Shelley's conduct than any that has hitherto prevailed.¹ The discovery attracted significantly little attention at the time, and now the world is prepared to relapse into its former superficial judgment,

¹ *Shelley's Lost Letters to Harriet*. Edited with an Introduction by Leslie Hotson. (London: Faber and Faber, 1930.)

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which has the sanction of all those forces, those ‘habitual inertias’, which maintain the social code in its hard complacency and fathomless hypocrisy.

I shall not recount the whole story again. A blunt statement of the true circumstances would read somewhat as follows: In the year 1811, a harpy named Eliza Westbrook vamped a youth of nineteen into marrying her sister, a schoolgirl of sixteen. The youth had just been expelled from Oxford for ‘atheism’, was homeless, excited and impressionable, and was moreover the heir to a great estate. The schoolgirl was pretty, neat and witty, but completely under the control of the sister. There was a story of ‘tyranny’ at home and school, and a threat of suicide if not rescued. The youth, impetuous and romantic, proposed elopement; was eagerly accepted; and the harpy triumphed, even to the extent of fastening herself to the poor deluded couple.¹ The rest of the story is best told in a few excerpts from the letters of this youth, Shelley:

‘1811 (*no date*). What have I said? I declare, quite *ludicrous*. I advised her to resist. She wrote to say that resistance was useless, but that she would fly with me and threw herself upon my protection. We shall have £200 a year; when we find it run short, we must live, I suppose, upon love! Gratitude and admiration, all demand that I should love her *for ever*. (*To Hogg*.)

‘March 16, 1814. My friend, you are happier than I. You have the pleasures as well as the pains of sensibility. I have sunk into a premature old age of exhaustion, which renders me dead to everything, but the unenviable capacity of indulging

¹ Cf. Hogg: ‘Harriet Westbrook appears to have been dissatisfied with her school, but without any adequate cause, for she was kindly treated and well educated there. It is not impossible that this discontent was prompted and suggested to her, and that she was put up to it, and to much besides, by somebody, who conducted the whole affair—who had assumed and steadily persisted in keeping the complete direction of her.’ (Chap. XII.)

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the vanity of hope, and a terrible susceptibility to objects of disgust and hatred. (*To Hogg.*)

‘(*The same*). Eliza is still with us. . . . I certainly hate her with all my heart and soul. It is a sight which awakens an inexpressible sensation of disgust and horror, to see her caress my poor little Ianthe, in whom I may hereafter find the consolation of sympathy. I sometimes feel faint with the fatigue of checking the overflowings of my unbounded abhorrence for this miserable wretch. She is no more than a blind and loathsome worm, that cannot see to sting. (*To Hogg.*)

‘*July, 1814 (no date)*. I repeat (and believe me, for I am sincere) that my attachment to you is unimpaired. I conceive that it has acquired even a deeper and more lasting character, that it is now less exposed than ever to the fluctuations of phantasy or caprice. Our connection was not one of passion and impulse. Friendship was its basis, and on this basis it has enlarged and strengthened. It is no reproach to me that you have never filled my heart with an all-sufficing passion; perhaps you are even yourself a stranger to these impulses, which one day may be awakened by some nobler and worthier than me; and you may find a lover as passionate and faithful, as I shall ever be a friend affectionate and sincere! (*To Harriet.*)

‘*September 15, 1814*. You think that I have injured you. Since I first beheld you almost, my chief study has been to overwhelm you with benefits. Even now when a violent and lasting passion for another leads me to prefer her society to yours, I am perpetually employed in devising how I can be permanently and truly useful to you, in what manner my time and my fortune may be most securely expended for your real interests. In return for this it is not well that I should be wounded with reproach and blame: so unexampled and singular an attachment demands a return far different. And it would be generous, nay even just, to consider with kindness that woman whom my judgment and my heart have selected

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as the noblest and the most excellent of human beings. (*To Harriet.*)

‘September 27, 1814. A common love for all that the world detests was once the bond of union between us. This you have been the first to break; and you have lost a friend whom you will with difficulty replace. Your contumelious language toward Mary is equally impotent and mean. You appeal to the vilest superstitions of the most ignorant and slavish of mankind. I consider it an insult that you address such cant to me. (*To Harriet.*)’

‘? October 3, 1814. I am united to another; you are no longer my wife. Perhaps I have done you injury, but surely most innocently and unintentionally, in having commenced any connexion with you. That injury, whatever be its amount, was not to be avoided. (*To Harriet.*)’

Such excerpts do not convey the whole story, but the full letters are there for any reader to consult. They must be supplemented by some estimate of the personality of Harriet, such as I have attempted for the personality of Shelley. But whatever conclusion we reached on the basis of the somewhat contradictory evidence, it would not affect the issue. Harriet may have been an angel in the house, with all the virtues of a good wife and an intelligent companion; or she may have been an extremely frivolous and tiresome school-girl, with a mania for self-destruction, incapable of passion as of understanding. In either case, she and Shelley were victims of life’s most cruel joke (life, in this instance, being to a considerable extent personified in Eliza). Shelley, in his dilemma, might have kept the code and earned the approval of future moralists; but we do not know to what alternative tragedy he and Harriet would have drifted. Out of the fullness of his heart and the strength of his philosophy he chose to assert his individual liberty. He earned immediate opprobrium and

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more than a century of calumny; but he lifted himself out of a premature old age of exhaustion, into a brighter element of intellectual vitality, and into a new lease of poetic inspiration.

Earlier in his life, shortly before he was married to Harriet Westbrook, Shelley had upheld against Hogg the proposition that 'laws were not made for men of honour'. He then argued the case, as eloquently as any undergraduate, with appeals to Aristotle and Godwin. Three years later he had to argue the case in his own destiny, and deep within his own being he found that philosophy of love which is the theme of his greatest poetry. A superficial and a cynical mind will only see in such philosophical poetry a rationalization of Shelley's selfish instincts; but from our nearer and more sympathetic point of view we can have a deeper appreciation of a feeling too organic to be selfish, too magnanimous to be immoral, and too hopeful, in 'this cold common hell, our life', to be denied.

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The particular quality of Shelley's poetry still remains to be defined. It is a quality directly related to the nature of his personality, and that is why I have taken so much trouble to describe that personality. Understanding the personality, we may more easily, more openly, appreciate the poetry.

Byron, who was a very honest critic, even of his friends, was the first to be aware of Shelley's *particular* quality. 'You know my high opinion of your own poetry', he wrote to Shelley, and added the reason: '—because it is of *no* school.' To Byron all the rest of his contemporaries seemed 'second-hand' imitators of antique models or doctrinaire exponents of a mannerism. Shelley alone could not be so simply classified; his verse was too honestly original, too independently thought and wrought, to be accepted as 'fashionable literature'. For there are always these two types of originality: originality that responds like the *Aeolian* harp to every

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gust of contemporary feeling, pleasing by its anticipation of what is but half-formed in the public consciousness; and originality that is not influenced by anything outside the poet's own consciousness, but is the direct product of his individual mind and independent feeling. The latter type is always long in winning recognition, and since Shelley's originality was essentially of this type, we need not be surprised that only a few of his contemporaries appreciated his poetry for its proper qualities.

The reaction of Keats is the most interesting, for he had perhaps a profounder understanding of the nature of poetry than any man of that age—profounder, I would say, than Byron and even profounder than Coleridge. We only discern this from the occasional statements made in his letters—there is unfortunately no formal essay to compare with Shelley's. Nor did Keats live to write poetry with which he was personally satisfied; we must not, that is to say, treat the poetry of Keats as an exemplification of his poetic ideals. A detailed comparison of the poetry of Keats and Shelley would not therefore be of great value. But Keats's reaction to Shelley's poetry, expressed in a letter to Shelley, is most definitely critical:

‘... You might curb your magnanimity and be more of an artist, and load every rift of your subject with ore. The thought of such discipline must fall like cold chains upon you, who perhaps never sat with your wings furled for six months together.’

We cannot doubt the force of the impact which Shelley's poetry had made on Keats. The poetry had been felt, but felt as something strange or inadequate. And actually we can see that what is involved is a clash of personalities. There is no need to describe Keats's personality at length; but it was in no way parallel to Shelley's. Keats was not, of course, a normal type—no genius is; but compared with Shelley he was far

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more fully adjusted to his environment; physically more masculine and heterosexual; and though a sick man ('when I shook him by the hand there was death'), not a morbid one. Sensitive critics have even been considerably disturbed by what they regard as a deplorable strain of coarseness and vulgarity in his nature. Without going into any great detail, it will be obvious that the general mode of expression of such a personality would be very different from Shelley's; it would, by a process contrary to the one we have described in Shelley's case, show a tendency towards definiteness and objectivity. Now though much of Keats's poetry is anything but definite and objective, he was very conscious, as we have seen, of an intolerable hiatus between his personality and the poetic dictation he had derived from traditional models and current fashions; and his whole effort, as expressed in his short but intense poetic development, is towards objective virtues.

The whole tendency of Shelley, on the contrary, is towards a clarification and abstraction of thought—away from the personal and the particular towards the general and the universal. Between the transcendental intellectualism of Shelley and the concrete sensualism of Keats there could be, and was, no contact.

The highest beauties of Keats's poetry are enumerative: a positive evocation of the tone and texture of physical objects. Even when describing an abstract conception like Melancholy, the imagery of physical sensation is dominant:

*Ay, in the very temple of Delight
Veil'd Melancholy has her sovereign shrine,
Though seen of none save him whose strenuous tongue
Can burst Joy's grape against his palate fine . . .*

But the highest beauties of Shelley's poetry are evanescent and imponderable—thought so tenuous and intuitive, that it has no visual equivalent; no positive impact:

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*Life of Life! thy lips enkindle
With their love the breath between them;
And thy smiles before they dwindle
Make the cold air fire; then screen them
In those looks, where whoso gazes
Faints, entangled in their mazes.*

*Child of Light! thy limbs are burning
Through the vest which seems to hide them;
As the radiant lines of morning
Through the clouds ere they divide them;
And this atmosphere divinest
Shrouds thee whereso'er thou shinest.*

*Fair are others; none beholds thee,
But thy voice sounds low and tender
Like the fairest, for it folds thee
From the sight, that liquid splendour,
And all feel, yet see thee never,
As I feel now, lost for ever!*

*Lamp of Earth! where'er thou movest
Its dim shapes are clad with brightness,
And the souls of whom thou lovest
Walk upon the winds with lightness,
Till they fail, as I am failing,
Dizzy, lost, yet unbewailing!*

In such a poem—and it is the supreme type of Shelley's poetic utterance—every image fades into air, every outline is dissolved in fire. The idea conveyed—the notional content—is almost negligible; the poetry exists in the suspension of meaning, in the avoidance of actuality.

In other words, such poetry has no precision, and the process of its unfolding is not logical. It does not answer to a general definition of any kind. It is vain to apply to it that method

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of criticism which assumes that the ardour of a verse can be analysed into separate vocables, and that poetry is a function of sound. Poetry is mainly a function of language—the exploitation of a medium, a vocal and sensuous material, in the interests of a personal mood or emotion, or of the thoughts evoked by such moods and emotions. I do not think we can say much more about it; according to our sensitivity we recognize its success. The rest of our reasoning about it is either mere prejudice, ethical anxiety, or academic pride.

Among his contemporaries, Shelley was perhaps nearest in poetic quality to Landor, whose *Gebir* was a lasting joy to him. A critical justification for this attraction would not be far to seek. The next nearest analogies are with Schiller and Goethe, both of whom Shelley read with enthusiasm; the influence of *Faust* has been traced in *The Triumph of Life*,¹ but between Goethe and Shelley there is a general sympathy of poetic outlook which is not explained by direct contacts. Other analogies, some of which I have already mentioned, are remoter: ‘the gentle seriousness, the delicate sensibility, the calm and sustained energy’ of Ariosto; and above all ‘the first awakener of entranced Europe . . . the congregator of those great spirits who presided over the resurrection of learning; the Lucifer of that starry flock which in the thirteenth century shone forth from republican Italy as from a heaven, into the darkness of the benighted world’—Dante. All great poetry, said Shelley in the same reference to Dante, is *infinite*; and that is the final quality of his own poetry, the quality which lifts it into regions beyond the detractions of moralists and sciolists.²

Shelley is of no school; that is to say, Shelley is above all

¹ F. Melian Stawell, ‘Shelley’s *Triumph of Life*’, English Association: *Essay and Studies*, Vol. V, p. 105.

² The best elucidation of this quality in Shelley’s poetry is Leone Vivante’s, in the work already cited.

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schools, universal in the mode of his expression and the passion of his mind. That passion, the force that urged him to abundant voice, was simple, almost single, in its aim. ‘I knew Shelley more intimately than any man’, wrote Hogg, ‘but I never could discern in him any more than two fixed principles. The first was a strong, irrepressible love of liberty; of liberty in the abstract, and somewhat after the pattern of the ancient republics, without reference to the English constitution, respecting which he knew little and cared nothing, heeding it not at all. The second was an equally ardent love of toleration of all opinions, but more especially of religious opinions; of toleration, complete, entire, universal, unlimited; and, as a deduction and corollary from which latter principle, he felt an intense abhorrence of persecution of every kind, public or private.’ Liberty and toleration—these words have a tortured history, and are often perverted for a moral purpose. But that was not Shelley’s intention. ‘The highest moral purpose aimed at in the highest species of the drama, is the teaching the human heart, through its sympathies and antipathies, the knowledge of itself; in proportion to the possession of which knowledge, every human being is wise, just, sincere, tolerant and kind.’ Inasmuch as the final quality of Shelley’s poetry is infinitude, so the final quality of his mind is sympathy. Sympathy and infinitude—these are expansive virtues, not avowed in the dry air of disillusion, awaiting a world of peace and justice for their due recognition.

ESSAY IV

Byron

It was evident that he was a prey to some cureless disquiet; but whether it arose from ambition, love, remorse, grief, from one or all of these, or merely from a morbid temperament akin to disease, I could not discover: there were circumstances alleged which might have justified the application to each of these causes; but, as I have before said, these were so contradictory and contradicted, that none could be fixed upon with accuracy. Where there is mystery, it is generally supposed that there must also be evil: I know not how this may be, but in him there certainly was the one, though I could not ascertain the extent of the other—and felt loth, as far as regarded himself, to believe in its existence.

From a Fragment of a Novel by BYRON

The only hope of treating Byron's life and work with any degree of freshness is to return to the poems, letters, and other personal records. If we then keep our critical attention fixed on the original documents, we may find it possible to ignore most of the commentaries, partial judgments, and subsidiary scandals which for more than a hundred years have obscured the real issues. For these are primarily poetical: Byron intended from his boyhood to be a poet, proceeded to write several substantial volumes of verse, and even during his lifetime was acclaimed a universal genius. At the same time, owing to various incidental features of his life—his social rank, his personal beauty, his numerous love affairs, his private vices and public virtues—the Byronic legend was invented; and ever since Byron the Poet and Byron the Symbolic Figure have existed side by side in the public imagination, the symbol gradually becoming an excuse for neglecting the poetry, and the poetry an excuse for investing the symbol with false sentiment. In Byron's case, even

Byron

more than in the comparable cases of Goethe and Shelley, it is necessary to guard against the importation of moral judgments into a literary context; or, conversely, against allowing our literary values to influence, one way or the other, our estimate of the moral significance of the poet's actions. Neither the fact that the poet's love affairs were scandalous, nor the fact that he gave his life to the cause of freedom, has any bearing on the position Byron should occupy in the world of letters. If a moral judgment is relevant, the evidence should be detectable in the poetry itself.

The process by which a poet (or a soldier or a politician) becomes a Symbolic Figure is very obscure. It is due to the congruence of certain qualities in the man and to what, for want of a better term, we usually call the Spirit of the Age (*Zeitgeist*). In the case of a poet, it has little to do with the quality of the poetry. In the Elizabethan age, for example, it is Sir Philip Sidney and not Shakespeare who is the Symbolic Figure. An heroic death seems to put the seal on the transaction, but both Sidney and Byron had in some sense been 'elected' before their deaths—Sidney as a 'natural centre'¹ in a free society, Byron as a free spirit in a conventional society. In the course of this essay we must try to define what we mean by freedom of spirit, but whatever its nature, it combined effectively with another quality which Byron possessed, and which was poignantly representative of the period—his *Weltschmerz*.

This peculiar amalgam of naturalistic sentiment, cosmic anxiety, and dispositional spleen had its origin, as its name indicates, in Germany, and Goethe's *Werther* had been its typical embodiment. To what extent *Weltschmerz* was (and still

¹ '... he was such a master, with so commanding and yet equal ways amongst men, that wheresoever he went, he was beloved and obeyed: yea into what action soever he came last at the first, he became first at the last: the whole managing of the business, not by usurpation or violence, but—as it were—by right and acknowledgment, falling into his hands as into a natural centre.'—Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke.

is) an infectious complaint is not in doubt. Though he could not read German (but only swear ‘potently’ in it), Byron nevertheless held the older poet in great esteem—both *Mandred* and *The Deformed Transformed* are influenced by *Faust*, and *Werner* is dedicated to Goethe.¹ But Byron’s own *Welt-schmerz* was genuine enough—unless we are to accept the view that his whole life was an affected pose. The clearest expression of the mood is perhaps that given in his *Clarens* Journal under the date 29 September 1816:

‘I am a lover of Nature and an admirer of Beauty. I can bear fatigue and welcome privation, and have seen some of the noblest views in the world. But in all this—the recollections of bitterness, and more especially of recent and more home desolation, which must accompany me through life, have preyed upon me here; and neither the music of the Shepherd, the crashing of the Avalanche, nor the torrent, the mountain, the Glacier, the Forest, nor the Cloud, have for one moment lightened the weight upon my heart, nor enabled me to lose my own wretched identity in the majesty, and the power, and the Glory, around, above, and beneath me.

‘I am past reproaches; and there is a time for all things. I am past the wish of vengeance, and I know of none like for what I have suffered; but the hour will come, when what I feel must be felt, and the —— but enough.’ (*Letters and Journals*, III, 364–5.)

This particular Journal was written for Augusta, ‘my own dearest Sis’, with whom he was always as unaffected as it was in his nature to be, and we may assume that Byron really did feel and suffer in this way. Our first task should be an attempt

¹ ‘I mean to dedicate Werner to Goethe. I look upon him as the greatest genius that the age has produced. I desired Murray to inscribe his name to a former work; but he pretends my letter containing the order came too late. It would have been more worthy of him than this.’—Thomas Medwin, *Conversations* (1824), p. 329.

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at a diagnosis of his state of mind, for out of it proceeded not only the almost daemonic energy with which he lived and wrote, but also the substance and, in some sense to be determined, the quality of what he wrote.

We have been taught to look in two places for a clue to a person's temperament—in heredity and in early environment. In both Byron was exceptional. His ancestry was 'a dark legend', and Byron himself always believed that his family was under a curse. There was certainly a strain of violence in the race, often expressed in brave deeds on the battlefield (the first Lord Byron earned his title for his services to King Charles I in the Civil War). There were men of taste and refinement in succeeding generations, but the fifth Lord Byron ('the Wicked Lord') was tried for murder by his peers. The poet's grandfather Admiral John Byron ('Foul-weather Jack') seems to have been unlucky rather than reckless; but his father ('Mad Jack') inherited the 'Wicked Lord's' violent temper, expressed the family recklessness at the gambling table, and is suspected of having ended his life by suicide.¹ The eccentricities and extravagances of these gentry are fully recorded in various biographical works, but here we need only consider Byron's own attitude to his heritage. It is clearly expressed in a letter he wrote to a Monsieur J. J. Coulmann who published an account of a visit he paid to Byron in Genoa in 1823: Byron is writing to correct certain statements published by a Monsieur Pichot in an essay attached to the fourth edition of a translation of his *Oeuvres complètes* which Coulmann had sent to him:

'... the same author has cruelly calumniated my father and my grand-uncle, but more especially the former. So far from

¹ The suggestion, said to come from Byron himself, may be traced back to the Rev. William Harness, who as a boy was befriended by Byron at Harrow. It is repeated by Jeaffreson (vol. I, p. 45) and Maurois (Eng. trans., p. 33) but has no documentary basis.

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being “brutal”, he was, according to the testimony of all those who knew him, of an extremely amiable and (*enjoué*) joyous character, but careless (*insouciant*) and dissipated. He had, consequently, the reputation of a good officer, and showed himself such in the Guards, in America. The facts themselves refute the assertion. It is not by “brutality” that a young Officer in the Guards seduces and carries off a Marchioness, and marries two heiresses. It is true that he was a very handsome man, which goes a great way. . . . His second wife, my respected mother, had, I assure you, too proud a spirit to bear the ill-usage of any man, no matter who he might be; and this she would have soon proved. I should add, that he lived a long time in Paris, and was in habits of intimacy with the old Marshal Biron, Commandant of the French Guards; who, from the similitude of names, and Norman origin of our family, supposed that there was some distant relationship between us. He died some years before the age of forty, and whatever may have been his faults, they were certainly not those of harshness and grossness (*dureté et grossiereté*) Augusta and I have always loved the memory of our father as much as we loved each other, and this at least forms a presumption that the stain of harshness was not applicable to it.¹

Byron was only three years old when in the summer of 1791 his father died at Valenciennes, whither he had fled some months earlier. Even allowing for the child’s precocity, his knowledge of his father’s character could not have been very direct. But there is no doubt that in his fatherless state, and in reaction to his mother, Byron developed a mental ‘complex’ of a specific kind. Of his mother he wrote, at the age of sixteen, the following account:

¹ *Letters and Journals*, VI, 231–2. The letter, though probably written in English by Byron, was published in French and subsequently re-translated to English by another hand.

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'MY DEAREST AUGUSTA,—I seize this interval of my *amiable* mother's absence this afternoon, again to inform you, or rather to be informed by you, of what is going on. For my own part I can send nothing to amuse you, excepting a repetition of my complaints against my tormentor, whose *diabolical* disposition (pardon me for staining my paper with so harsh a word) seems to increase with age, and to acquire new force with Time. The more I see of her the more my dislike augments; nor can I so entirely conquer the appearance of it, as to prevent her from perceiving my opinion; this, so far from calming the Gale, blows it into a *hurricane*, which threatens to destroy everything, till exhausted by its own violence, it is lulled into a sullen torpor, which, after a short period, is again roused into fresh and revived frenzy, to me most terrible, and to every other Spectator astonishing. She then declares that she plainly sees I hate her, that I am leagued with her bitter enemies, viz. Yourself, Ld C[arlisle] and Mr H[anson], and, as I never Dissemble or contradict her, we are all *honoured* with a multiplicity of epithets, too *numerous*, and some of them too *gross*, to be repeated. . . . Such Augusta is the happy life I now lead, such my *amusements*. I wander about hating everything I behold, and if I remained here a few months longer, I should become, what with *envy, spleen and all uncharitableness*, a complete *misanthrope*. . . .' (*Letters and Journals*, I, 30-1.)

There are several other passages to the same effect in Byron's letters, and from them we gather a significant detail —Mrs Byron was in the habit of 'raking up the ashes of my *father*'. 'Within one little hour, I have not only heard myself, but have heard my *whole family*, by the *father's side*, *stigmatized* in terms that the *blackest malevolence* would perhaps shrink from, and that too in words that you would be shocked to hear. Such, Augusta, such is my mother; *my mother!*' It needs no elaborate psychological reasoning to see that such a

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situation was bound to give rise to an idealization of the lost parent—even, in the technical Freudian sense, to an identification, and therefore to a powerful element in the formation of Byron's character. 'Mad Jack', with all his amiable and joyous habits, became the beau idéal (we now call it the ego-ideal) of the young Byron.

Among other possible influences of a decisive character in Byron's formative years, one must pause a little curiously over the name of May Gray, his Scottish 'nannie'. She was with him from earliest infancy until the end of 1799—that is to say, for the first twelve years of his life. Considering the character of his mother, it is likely that this unknown woman obtained a considerable hold upon the imagination of her charge. She seems to have combined a superstitious Calvinism with a more natural profligacy, and when John Hanson, the Byrons' solicitor, visited Nottingham in 1799, during the absence of Mrs Byron, he was so appalled by the relationship that then existed between the servant and her charge that he wrote to Mrs Byron to suggest instant dismissal. Here is the picture he drew:

'My honourable little companion, tho' disposed to retain his feelings, could not refrain, from the harsh usage he had received at her hands, from complaining to me, and such is his dread of the Woman that I really believe he would forego the satisfaction of seeing you if he thought he was not to meet her again. He told me that she was perpetually beating him, and that his bones sometimes ached from it; that she brought all sorts of Company of the very lowest Description into his apartments; that she was out late at nights, and he was frequently left to put himself to bed; that she would take the Chaise-boys into the Chaise with her, and stopped at every little Ale-house to drink with them. But, Madam, this is not all; she has even—traduced yourself.' (*Letters and Journals*, I, 10 n.)

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Byron was then eleven years old, and all of them had been spent in close association with this woman. It is a speculation, of course, but it would seem likely that she had some connexion with those early and fatal experiences to which Byron made frequent and mysterious reference. ‘My passions were developed very early,’ he wrote in the journal of 1821 which he called ‘Detached Thoughts’—‘so early, that few would believe me, if I were to state the period, and the facts which accompanied it. Perhaps this was one of the reasons which caused the anticipated melancholy of my thoughts—having anticipated life.’ And again, in the same journal: ‘If I could explain at length the *real* causes which have contributed to increase this perhaps *natural* temperament of mine, this Melancholy which hath made me a byeword, nobody would wonder; but this is impossible without doing much mischief. I do not know what other men’s lives have been, but I cannot conceive anything more strange than some of the earlier parts of mine. I have written my memoirs, but omitted *all* the really *consequential* and *important* parts, from deference to the dead, to the living, and to those who must be both.’ It is sometimes suggested that these are exaggerated references to his early passion for Mary Duff (the little girl with whom he fell in love at the age of nine), but that experience must have been innocent enough, and we have Hobhouse’s witness to the fact. In a marginal note to Moore’s *Life* (first published by Maurois, *Byron*, p. 442) he remarked: ‘With respect to the early development of these propensities in Byron, I am acquainted with a regular fact scarcely fit for narration, but much less romantic and more satisfactory than the amour with Mary Duff.’ In a letter to Lady Melbourne of 1 May 1814, referring evidently to Augusta, Byron wrote: ‘It, indeed, puzzles me to account for ——: it is true she married a fool, but she *would* have him; they agreed, and agree very well, and I have never heard a complaint, but many vindications, of

him. As for me, brought up as I was, and sent into the world as I was, both physically and morally, nothing better could be expected, and it is odd that I always had a foreboding and I remember when a child reading the Roman history about a *marriage* I will tell you of when we meet, asking my mère why I should not marry X.' The reference is to his half-sister, Augusta Leigh, and the letter indicates clearly that his early experiences were of a nature demoralizing enough to extenuate, in his own view, his later guilt; and to the same early experiences he always attributed those feelings of melancholy and disgust which drove him to a heartless libertinism. The following description of his life at Cambridge (from '*Detached Thoughts*') gives an impression of unaffected self-analysis:

'My companions were not unsocial, but the contrary—lively, hospitable, of rank, and fortune, and gay far beyond my gaiety. I mingled with, and dined and supped, etc., with them; but I know not how, it was one of the deadliest and heaviest feelings of my life to feel that I was no longer a boy. From that moment I began to grow old in my own esteem; and in my esteem age is not estimable. I took my gradations in the vices with great promptitude, but they were not to my taste; for my early passions, though violent in the extreme, were concentrated, and hated division or spreading abroad. I could have left or lost the world with or for that which I loved; but, though my temperament was naturally burning, I could not share in the commonplace libertinism of the place and time without disgust. And yet this very disgust, and my heart thrown back upon itself, threw me into excesses perhaps more fatal than those from which I shrunk, as fixing upon one (at a time) the passions, which, spread amongst many, would have hurt only myself.' (*Letters and Journals*, V, 445–6.)

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'I must not go on with these reflections', wrote Byron in this same journal of 1821, 'or I shall be letting out some secret or other to paralyse posterity.' He never did let out that secret, and though Hobhouse and one or two other intimate friends may have known it, they too kept silent. Byron in general was not at all squeamish in his conversation, letters, and journals, and it is difficult to imagine the nature of the experience that produced such a permanent psychological trauma. But there is no doubt of its reality—it was no pretence on Byron's part, and its effect was not merely a disgust of life and a heart 'thrown back upon itself', but also an effort to escape from himself which took the form of poetic activity. 'To withdraw *myself* from *myself* (oh that cursed selfishness!) has ever been my sole, my entire, my sincere motive in scribbling at all; and publishing is also the continuance of the same object, by the action it affords to the mind, which else recoils upon itself.' (*Journal* of 1813.) It is true that about three months earlier (6 September) in sending Miss Milbanke a somewhat artificial portrait of himself he had expressed a somewhat different philosophy of life. 'The great object of life is sensation—to feel that we exist, even though in pain. It is this 'craving void' which drives us to gaming—to battle—to travel—to intemperate, but keenly felt pursuits of any description, whose principal attraction is the agitation inseparable from their accomplishment.' But he would hardly venture to exhibit the blackness of his humours to his prospective bride—a 'craving void' she would understand and appreciate: it was the fashionable *Angst* of the period.

Whilst we must admit that Byron's despair was a very real thing, and in some sense the basis of his feverish activity, nevertheless he was inspired by a more naïve sense of glory. Byron at sixteen was not too young to be taken seriously, and at that age he had written to his mother: ' . . . the way to riches, to greatness lies before me. I can, I will cut myself a path

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through the world or perish in the attempt. Others have begun life with nothing and ended greatly. And shall I, who have a competent if not a large fortune, remain idle? No, I will carve myself the passage to Grandeur, but never with Dishonour. These, Madam, are my intentions.¹ And at the other end of his life there is no doubt that he was stirred by the same sense of glory:

*The dead have been awakened—shall I sleep?
The World's at war with tyrants—shall I crouch?
The harvest's ripe—and shall I pause to reap?
I slumber not; the thorn is in my Couch;
Each day a trumpet soundeth in mine ear,
Its echo in my heart—²*

It was a call he responded to—two months later he was in Cephalonia and ten months later he was dead. The wavering ambivalence of his will is expressed in that last poem which has some claim to be considered his best, written on his thirty-sixth birthday:

*'T is time this heart should be unmoved,
Since others it hath ceased to move:
Yet, though I cannot be beloved,
Still let me love!*

*My days are in the yellow leaf;
The flowers and fruits of Love are gone;
The worm, the canker, and the grief
Are mine alone!*

*The fire that on my bosom preys
Is lone as some Volcanic isle;
No torch is kindled at its blaze—
A funeral pile.*

¹ *Byron: a Self-Portrait*. Edited by Peter Quennell. London, 1950, I, 10.

² *Letters*, 1901, vi, 238.

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*The hope, the fear, the jealous care,
The exalted portion of the pain
And power of love, I cannot share,
But wear the chain.*

*But 't is not thus—and 't is not here—
Such thoughts should shake my soul, not now
Where Glory decks the hero's bier,
Or binds his brow.*

*The Sword, the Banner, and the Field
Glory and Greece, around me see!
The Spartan, borne upon his shield,
Was not more free.*

*Awake! (not Greece—she is awake!)
Awake, my spirit! Think through whom
Thy life-blood tracks its parent lake,
And then strike home!*

*Tread those reviving passions down,
Unworthy manhood!—unto thee
Indifferent should the smile or frown
Of Beauty be.*

*If thou regret' st thy youth, why live?
The land of honourable death
Is here:—up to the Field, and give
Away thy breath!*

*Seek out—less often sought than found—
A soldier's grave, for thee the best;
Then look around, and choose thy ground,
And take thy Rest.*

It is almost too good to be true—true in the sense of being authentic, true in the sense of being sincere. But it is both,

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and it illustrates the contradiction within Byron's personality. In such a case one must recall Lord Acton's profound observation: 'Good and evil lie close together. Seek no artistic unity in character.' If we must accept the word evil to describe one aspect of Byron's character (and certainly we must if we share Acton's morality) then we must also accept the word good to describe this other equally significant aspect. My own view is that Byron was in some sense beyond good and evil, one of Nietzsche's 'free spirits'. But as Nietzsche was careful to point out, that is a privilege given to the very few, and does not arise from a sense of obligation, from vulgar ambition. The kind of aristocracy from which Byron sprang may be eugenically questionable, but at least he had the aristocratic sense of detachment. Complaining to Murray about the books he had sent out to him to read in Ravenna ('Campbell is lecturing, Moore idling, Southey twaddling, Wordsworth driveling, Coleridge muddling, Joanna Baillie piddling, Bowles quibbling, squabbling and sniveling . . .') he observed: 'The pity of these men is, that they never lived either in *high life*, nor in *solitude*: there is no medium for the knowledge of the *busy* or the *still* world. If admitted into high life for a season, it is merely as *spectators*—they form no part of the Mechanism thereof. Now Moore and I, the one by circumstances, and the other by birth, happened to be free of the corporation, and to have entered into its pulses and passions, *quarum partes fuimus*. Both of us have learnt by this much which nothing else could have taught us.' (*Letters and Journals*, V, 362–3.) That he could admit Moore, the son of an Irish grocer, into the same class proves that his conception of aristocracy was not altogether snobbish. The further notion that it belongs to the still world no less than to the busy world shows that the conception was not merely social and superficial. Byron was always conscious of his obligations and responsibilities—personal obligations to his friends and depen-

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dants, public responsibilities towards the poor and oppressed. These feelings were not sympathetic: they were based on his concept of justice and his confident knowledge that he had ‘a part to play’ in the world.

There are perhaps only two other aspects of his personality that need be mentioned—the quality of his affections, and the quality of his intelligence. His attitude to women is too notorious to need much discussion. There is no doubt that he had a strong and perhaps unconscious need for the maternal affection that had been denied to him in childhood, and this was supplied by a friend like Lady Melbourne and also, in some more obscure sense, by Augusta Leigh. ‘There is something to me’, he once confessed, ‘very softening in the presence of a woman,—some strange influence, even if one is not in love with them—which I cannot at all account for, having no very high opinion of the sex. But yet,—I always feel in better humour with myself and every thing else, if there is a woman within ken. Even Mrs Mule, my firelighter,—the most ancient and withered of her kind,—and (except to myself) not the best-tempered—always makes me laugh,—no difficult task when I am “in the vein”.’ (*Journal*, 27 February 1814.) But the feelings aroused by a Caroline Lamb or a Frances Webster cannot be described as ‘very softening’. It is a chase, with the possibility of a kill at the end; and the kill (which may be sadistically prolonged) is the end of the matter so far as Byron himself is concerned. Only towards the end of his life does he begin to tire of the chase and to submit (with Teresa Guiccioli), to something like constant devotion. Even so—‘It is awful work, this love, and prevents all a man’s projects of good and glory’.

One might pursue the analysis of Byron’s amorous propensities into more detail, but it would not add much to our general understanding of the man. He loved as he wrote—to escape from himself. But he loved with discrimination.

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‘What an antithetical mind!’ he cried on reading some ‘unpublished and never-to-be-published’ letters of Burns’s ‘—tenderness, roughness—delicacy, coarseness—sentiment, sensuality—soaring and grovelling, dirt and deity—all mixed up in that one compound of inspired clay!’ That was not his way of life, or of love. ‘A true voluptuary’, he wrote in his *Journal* (13 December 1813), ‘will never abandon his mind to the grossness of reality. It is by exalting the earthly, the material, the *physique* of our pleasures, by veiling these ideas, by forgetting them altogether, or, at least, never naming them hardly to one’s self, that we alone can prevent them from disgusting.’ It is not on record that any of the women he loved ever regretted the experience.

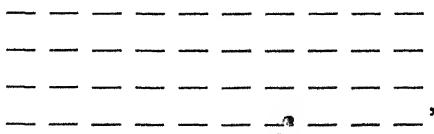
Byron’s intelligence, by which I mean his natural sagacity rather than his intellectual powers, has perhaps never been sufficiently appreciated. His handling of his agents and his publisher was always admirably clear and concise (though not necessarily tactful). Considering the kind of life he wished to lead, he dealt with his estates and debts in a practical and decisive fashion. In Greece he showed a genuine capacity for administration and the logistics of a military campaign. But it is in his daily life—his relationships with his friends and his comments on the events of the day—that we find, not common sense, but sensitive moral perceptions. One has only to follow, in the sequence of letters he wrote to Lady Mel bourne, the course of his abortive wooing of Lady Frances Webster, to see in full operation a social strategy, part instinct and part design, which belongs to the highest, if least profitable, of human capacities.

Of Byron’s intellectual powers one must speak with less respect. He was superstitious, but not religious; an atheist, and yet a fatalist. From various sources, as I have already said, he had contracted the current *Weltschmerz*, and in this mood he would sometimes attempt to philosophize—in poetry and

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in prose. The following sample, from the *Diary* of 1821, gives the substance of it all:

‘Why, at the very height of desire and human pleasure,—worldly, social, amorous, ambitious, or even avaricious,—does there mingle a certain sense of doubt and sorrow—a fear of what is to come—a doubt of what *is*—a retrospect to the past, leading to a prognostication of the future? . . . I know not, except that on a pinnacle we are most susceptible of giddiness, and that we never fear falling except from a precipice—the higher, the more awful, and the more sublime; and, therefore, I am not sure that Fear is not a pleasurable sensation; at least, *Hope* is; and *what Hope* is there without a deep leaven of Fear? and what sensation is so delightful as *Hope*? and, if it were not for *Hope*, where would the Future be?—in hell. It is useless to say *where* the Present is, for most of us know; and as for the Past, *what* predominates in memory?—*Hope baffled*. Ergo, in all human affairs, it is *Hope—Hope—Hope*. I allow sixteen minutes, though I never counted them, to any given or supposed possession. From whatever place we commence, we know where it all must end. And yet, what good is there in knowing it? It does not make men better or wiser. During the greatest horrors of the greatest plagues (Athens and Florence, for example—see Thucydides and Machiavelli), men were more cruel and profligate than ever. It is all a mystery. I feel most things, but I know nothing, except



Admittedly this becomes more impressive when it is rhymed:

*Between two worlds Life hovers like a star,
'Twixt Night and Morn, upon the horizon's verge.*

Byron

How little do we know that which we are!

*How less what we may be! The eternal surge
Of Time and Tide rolls on and bears afar*

*Our bubbles; as the old burst, new emerge,
Lashed from the foam of ages; while the graves
Of Empires heave but like some passing waves.¹*

But nothing can disguise the essential emptiness of such a philosophy, and it is merely to dignify emptiness that we call it Nihilism. The philosophical reaction to Nihilism at the beginning of the nineteenth century was to be various forms of Existentialism, but though we can make out a case for regarding Coleridge and Wordsworth as existentialists of this kind, Byron remains obstinately cynical, gaily—but not confidently—superficial.

At this point a Marxist critic would no doubt attempt to relate Byron's state of mind to the profound social changes that were taking place in his time. There he was, representative of an old order (positively feudal!); around him, a new order with which he had no sympathy was coming into being; his very estates were to be sold to make way for the industrial revolution. Vulgarity was everywhere triumphant, and politics authoritarian. All this, to the full extent of a sociological thesis, we can admit; but in the end we have not explained why Byron became a nihilist and Shelley, in the same circumstances, a utopian socialist. In social status, in material environment, in historical destiny, nothing separated these two men; yet the quality of their poetry is totally distinct and their philosophy of life antithetical. They agree only in their revolt from the society into which they were born.

Nevertheless, Shelley was one of the few of his contemporaries whom Byron could admire. In no other direction is the limitation of Byron's intelligence so evident as in his literary judgments. One must admit that they were not consist-

¹ *Don Juan*, xcix. 'End of Canto 15th Mch. 25, 1823, B.'

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ently wrong, and they were never conventional. He had a real appreciation of Goethe's greatness, and on the basis of an Italian translation one finds him ready to acclaim—surely in advance of any other English critic—the genius of Grillparzer ('... the tragedy of *Sappho* is superb and sublime! There is no denying it. The man has done a great thing in writing that play. And *who is he?* I know him not; but *ages will*. 'Tis a high intellect . . . Grillparzer is grand—antique—not so simple as the ancients, but very simple for a modern—to Madame de Staëlish, now and then—but altogether a great and goodly writer.') (*Diary*, 12 January 1821.) His opinions of past authors have consistency, too, and illustrate his prejudices. 'I look upon a proper appreciation of Pope as a touchstone of taste, and the present question as not only whether Pope is or is not in the first rank of our literature, but whether *that* literature shall or shall not relapse into the Barbarism from which it has scarcely emerged for above a century and a half.' 'It is also a great error', he added, 'to suppose the *present* a *high* age of English poetry. . . . Those poor idiots of the Lakes . . . are diluting our literature as much as they can.' (Letter to Octavius Gilchrist, 5 September 1821. (Quennell: *Byron, a Self-Portrait*, II, 664.)) Those poor idiots included, besides Southey, whom he despised on other than literary grounds, Wordsworth and Coleridge. The early Wordsworth he had admired. Writing to Leigh Hunt (30 October 1815) he said: 'I take leave to differ with you on Wordsworth, as freely as I once agreed with you; at that time I gave him credit for a promise, which is unfulfilled. I still think his capacity warrants all you say of *it* only, but that his performances since *Lyrical Ballads* are miserably inadequate to the ability which lurks within him: there is undoubtedly much natural talent spilt over the *Excursion*; but it is rain upon rocks—where it stands and stagnates, or rain upon sands—where it falls without fertilizing. Who can understand him? Let those who do,

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make him intelligible. Jacob Behmen, Swedenborg, and Joanna Southcote, are mere types of this arch-apostle of mystery and mysticism.' This makes clear (as his earlier review of the *Poems* of 1807 had done¹) that Byron's objection to Wordsworth was genuinely critical—he appreciated his 'native elegance, natural and unaffected', except where it became 'namby-pamby', but he had no sympathy for Wordsworth's philosophic faith, and perhaps no patience with it. But when it came to Keats there was what one can only describe as an organic lack of poetic sensibility in Byron. 'Mr. Keats . . . appears to me what I have already said: such writing is a sort of mental masturbation—* * * * * his *Imagination*. I don't mean he is *indecent*, but viciously soliciting his own ideas into a state, which is neither poetry nor anything else but a Bedlam vision produced by raw pork and opium.' (Letter to John Murray, 18 November 1820—best consulted in Quennell, *op. cit.*, p. 536.) Elsewhere he refers to 'the *outstretched* poesy of this miserable Self-polluter of the human mind', and the only clue to an explanation of such violence (for the two men had no personal contacts) is a reference in another letter to Keats's 'abuse of Pope'. To abuse Pope was as good as abusing Byron himself.

In his *Journal* of 1813 Byron drew 'a triangular *Gradus ad Parnassum*'. At the summit, 'undoubtedly the Monarch of Parnassus, and the most *English* of bards', he placed Walter Scott. Next, as 'the last of the best school', Rogers; Moore and Campbell both third, followed, a grade lower, by Southey, Wordsworth, and Coleridge; and, below them, 'the Many'. It is true that he adds, as an afterthought: 'I have ranked the names upon my triangle more upon what I believe popular opinion, than any decided opinion of my own', but his own gloss does not make any substantial difference to what we should now regard as a strange lack of discernment—'For, to

¹ *Letters and Journals*, I, 341–3.

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me, some of Moore's last *Erin* sparks—"As a beam o'er the face of the waters"—"When he who adoies thee"—"Oh blame not"—and "Oh breathe not his name"—are worth all the Epics that ever were composed.' All contemporary judgment is liable to aberration, and a critic of today has no grounds for feeling superior to Byron; but we have only to contrast his opinions with those of Shelley or Keats to see how much more sensitive they were to the enduring values in poetry.

This is perhaps to adopt a theory of poetry that Byron himself would not have admitted, and it is the theory upon which we must find Byron's own poetry lacking in certain essential qualities. These qualities may be specifically 'romantic', and my criticism of Byron's poetry must be expressed from within the romantic tradition. This tradition requires, in the highest type of poetry, two qualities which Byron despised—*curiosa felicitas* and ideal beauty. By the former phrase we mean, not merely apt words to express a thought (Byron had them in plenty) but words which by the originality of their application, or the originality of their collocation, produce an essentially somatic thrill of appreciation. The difference is easier to illustrate than to describe. Byron's felicity is at its best in lines such as:

- *She walks in beauty like the night
Of cloudless climes and starry skies.*

It is an explicit felicity; no image, no word, is far-fetched; that climes should be cloudless and skies starry is in each case the obvious cliché. But take two comparable lines from Donne:

*No Spring, nor Summer Beauty hath such grace,
As I have seen in one Autumnal face.*

Byron was utterly incapable of using an epithet with such a wealth of implied imagery as 'Autumnal' has in this context.

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One might say that his mind did not work in that way, and then one has said that his mind was not in the most fundamental sense poetic. He had other qualities, as I shall presently readily admit; but it is useless to pretend that he possessed that absolute grace which we find, not only in major poets like Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton; and Wordsworth; but also in a Wyatt, a Herrick, a Burns, a Hopkins.

As for ideal beauty, by this we mean, in Landor's words, 'the sublimer emanation, I will not say of the real, for this is the more real of the two, but of that which is ordinarily subject to the senses'. Great poets have believed that they were in some way giving expression to something greater than themselves. Wordsworth, for example, believed

*That Poets, even as Prophets, each with each
Connected in a mighty scheme of truth,
Have each for his peculiar dower, a sense
By which he is enabled to perceive
Something unseen before*

and on the basis of this belief, he hoped that a work of his

*Proceeding from the depth of untaught things,
Enduring and creative, might become
A power like one of Nature's.*

To such a claim Byron would have answered with a hoot of derision. Reality, and any thought about reality, was precisely what he wished to avoid. 'I began a comedy, and burnt it because the scene ran into *reality*—a novel, for the same reason. In rhyme, I can keep more away from the facts; but the thought always runs through, through . . . yes, yes, through.' And, from the same 'log-book' (1813): 'I envy no one the certainty of his self-approved wisdom.' It was not merely that Byron had no ambition to give expression to a philosophical faith in his verse—as we have seen, he had none

that was worth the trouble; rather, he regarded the practice of verse-writing as a means of ‘getting rid of thinking’. This attitude is not to be confused with superficiality, or shallowness of thought. It is a consciously adopted sophistication; a positive belief in making life an amusement and verse-writing a playful artifice. In self-criticism he found himself failing to live up to this ideal:

‘With regard to poetry in general, I am convinced, the more I think of it, that he (Moore) and *all* of us—Scott, Southey, Wordsworth, Moore, Campbell, I,—are all in the wrong, one as much as another; that we are upon a wrong revolutionary poetical system, or systems, not worth a damn in itself, and from which none but Rogers and Crabbe are free; and that the present and next generations will finally be of this opinion. I am the more confirmed in this by having lately gone over some of our classics, particularly *Pope*, whom I tried in this way—I took Moore’s poems and my own and some others, and went over them side by side with Pope’s, and I was really astonished (I ought not to have been so) and mortified at the ineffable distance in point of sense, harmony, effect, and even *Imagination*, passion, and *Invention*, between the little Queen Anne’s man, and us of the Lower Empire.’
(To John Murray, 17 September 1817), *Letters and Journals*, IV, 169.

It is the classical point of view, but Byron himself did not possess a classical mind, a disciplined nature. Only a fortnight before he wrote this letter, Byron had finished copying out the final draft of the fourth canto of *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, his most romantic poem.

Oh! that the Desert were my dwelling-place,
With one fair Spirit for my minister,
That I might all forget the human race,
And, hating no one, love but only her!

Byron

*Ye elements!—in whose ennobling stir
I feel myself exalted—Can ye not
Accord me such a Being? Do I err
In deeming such inhabit many a spot?
Though with them to converse can rarely be our lot.*

*There is a pleasure in the pathless woods,
There is a rapture on the lonely shore,
There is society, where none intrudes,
By the deep Sea, and Music in its roar:
I love not Man the less, but Nature more,
From these our interviews, in which I steal
From all I may be, or have been before,
To mingle with the Universe, and feel
What I can ne'er express—yet can not all conceal.*

Romantic and classic—we exchange these counters with bewildering effect. If to steal away and mingle with the Universe is a romantic proceeding, then Byron is the romantic, and Wordsworth and Coleridge, who were always careful to keep logical distinctions between man and nature, were classical. But if to write verse of this ease and suavity is to be classical, then Byron was classical, and the poets of *Kubla Khan* and *Michael* were romantic experimentalists, obsessed with some notion of a correspondency between form and feeling. There is more essential discipline in one of Wordsworth's sonnets ('They are the most puling, petrifying, stupidly platonic compositions', said Byron of sonnets in general) than in the whole of Byron's work. We must deny Byron that classical virtue. On the other hand, we must grant him the true romantic *afflatus*, the wildest poetic energy in the whole range of post-Shakespearean poetry. And yet writing was for him 'a task, and a painful one'. 'I feel exactly as you do about our "art"', he wrote to Moore, 'but it comes over me in a kind of rage every now and then, like * * * *, and

then, if I don't write to empty my mind, I go mad. As to that regular, uninterrupted love of writing, which you describe in your friend, I do not understand it. I feel it as a torture, which I must get rid of, but never as a pleasure. On the contrary, I think composition a great pain.[✓] He hated revising texts and correcting proofs, and at a pinch was willing that his friends should do the job for him. There are a few faultless lyrics, and there are many stanzas that conform to a pattern; but in general Byron's verse reveals a virtuoso's supreme contempt for the rules of the game, and he is never happier than when he gets by with some outrageous simile or far-fetched rhyme.

*Scheremoff and Chrematoff, Koklophti,
Koclobski, Kourakin, and Mouskin Pouskin,
All proper men of weapons, as e'er scoffed high
Against a foe, or ran a sabre through skin:
Little cared they for Mahomet or Mufti,
Unless to make their kettle-drums a new skin. . . .*

One of his most famous lyrics ('The Isles of Greece') is introduced with the following couplet:

*In Italy he'd ape the 'Trecentisti',
In Greece, he'd sing some sort of hymn like this t'ye:*

But these are not faults: they are the deliberate scrabblings of an impressionistic style.¹ Sc

In this style the works of Byron that we still read were written—*Don Juan*, *Childe Harold*, *The Vision of Judgment*, *Beppo*. All these works are satires—'*Don Juan* will be known by and bye, for what it is intended,—a *Satire on abuses of the present states of Society, and not an eulogy of vice: it may be now and then voluptuous: I can't help that*'. (Letter to

¹ The painterly term is not altogether inappropriate. Reading Byron (in 1824) Eugène Delacroix felt again 'that insatiable desire to create'. It was the beginning of the Impressionist movement in painting.

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Murray, 25 December 1822.) As such, this poem needs no further praise than that bestowed on it by its author:

‘As to *Don Juan*, confess—confess, you dog and be candid—that it is the sublime of *that there* sort of writing—it may be bawdy but is it not good English? It may be profligate but is it not *life*, is it not *the thing*? Could any man have written it who has not lived in the world?—and fooled in a post-chaise?—in a hackney coach?—in a gondola?—against a wall?—in a court carriage?—in a vis-à-vis?—on a table?—and under it?’
(Letter to the Hon. Douglas Kinnaird, 26 October 1819.
Quennell, *op. cit.*, 491.)

Yes: the sublime of ‘*that there* sort of writing’—in its class it remains, if not *sublime*, supreme—more vital, more amusing, more pertinent than anything of colder perfection that his most admired master ever wrote.

When this has been said, there remains the stricture that it is all a heartless and, if not immoral, then amoral exercise of wit, of little use to man or God.¹ Byron himself was well aware of this criticism and meets it at the beginning of Canto XIII of *Don Juan*. After warning the reader that

*I now mean to be serious;—it is time,
Since Laughter now-a-days is deemed too serious;
A jest at Vice by Virtue's called a crime,
And critically held as deleterious ...*

he proceeds to defend himself as the *spectator ab extra*:

*Rough Johnson, the great moralist, professed,
Right honestly, ‘he liked an honest hater!’—
The only truth that yet has been confessed
Within these latest thousand years or later.*

¹ Cf. Sir Herbert Grierson: ‘All that Byron’s poem wants is what no writer content to be a satirist and jester only could give it, a deeper pity for the human heart that suffers and is defeated in this strange, meaningless pageant.’ Preface to *Poems of Lord Byron*, London (Florence Press), 1923, p. xv.

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Perhaps the fine old fellow spoke in jest:—

*For my own part, I am but a mere spectator,
And gaze where'er the palace or the hovel is,
Much in the mode of Goethe's Mephistopheles;*

But neither love nor hate in much excess;

*Though 't was not once so. If I sneer sometimes,
It is because I cannot well do less,*

*And now and then it also suits my rhymes.
I should be very willing to redress*

*Men's wrongs, and rather check than punish crimes,
Had not Cervantes, in that too true tale
Of Quixote, shown how all such efforts fail.*

And after describing Cervantes' tale, he turns to 'the great moral taught by that real Epic unto all who have thought':

*Cervantes smiled Spain's chivalry away;
A single laugh demolished the right arm
Of his own country;—seldom since that day
Has Spain had heroes. While Romance could charm,
The World gave ground before her bright array;
And therefore have his volumes done much harm,
That all their glory, as a composition,
Was dearly purchased by his land's perdition.*

These stanzas express a profound truth, though it is one oftener found in Eastern than in Western philosophy. Byron would have agreed with Chuang Tzu: 'The last thing you should do is to tamper with men's hearts. The heart of man is like a spring; if you press it down, it only springs up the higher.' Or, in words more familiar but still of Eastern origin: 'Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature.' Properly speaking, satire is not an instrument of moral reform, or does not need to be; it is a mirror held up to

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the absurd or vicious aspects of human nature. The poet's role ends with that action. Byron's charge against Cervantes is that he made sport of 'noblest views'. It can be argued that this was not Cervantes' own intention—that it is merely the way the world has taken him.

There remains a whole section of Byron's work, not satirical in intention, and perhaps for this reason neglected by critics—those works of his last years which were to constitute what he called 'a mental theatre'. They begin, in 1817, with *Manfred*. *Marino Faliero* followed in 1820, and then, in rapid succession, *Sardanapalus* (January–May 1821), *The Two Foscari* (June–July 1821), *Cain* (July–September 1821), *Heaven and Earth* (October 1821), *Werner* (December 1821–January 1822), *The Deformed Transformed* (May–June 1822). *Manfred* lies apart, not only in date, but also in substance and style. Its similarity to Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* and Goethe's *Faust* has often been remarked, but is rather difficult to account for—Goethe was pleased to recognize his parentage, but Byron more than once protested that he had never read or seen Marlowe's play and only knew Goethe's 'from a sorry French translation, from an occasional reading or two into English of parts of it by Monk Lewis when at Diodati, and from the Hartz mountain-scene, that Shelley versified the other day'. (Medwin, *Conversations* (1824), p. 170.) The last remark is the most significant one, for in style and spirit *Manfred* belongs to Shelley's rather than to Goethe's world. In the year preceding its composition the two poets had been thrown together at a critical moment in both their lives, and they had become very intimate. Shelley's influence on Byron was direct and deep, and *Manfred* springs from the same poetic atmosphere as *Julian and Maddalo* and *Prometheus Unbound*. It has all Shelley's expressive energy, but it lacks his subtle fire. Even the soliloquy that Goethe admired so much ('We are the Fools of Time and Terror') is sullen metal. It is different

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when Byron interpolates an Incantation such as the lines beginning:

*When the Moon is on the wave,
And the glow-worm in the grass*

for although these are essentially Shelleyan in style, they take on an exceptional intensity because Byron is really addressing his sister Augusta and calling down a curse on his wife Annabella:

*By the cold breast and serpent smile,
By thy unfathomed gulfs of guile,
By that most seeming virtuous eye,
By thy shut soul's hypocrisy;
By the perfection of thine art
Which passed for human thine own heart;
By thy delight in others' pain,
And by thy brotherhood of Cain,
I call upon thee! and compel
Thyself to be thy proper Hell!*

With *Marino Faliero* began an altogether different type of drama, without parallel unless it is in the French theatre of our own time (I am thinking of certain plays of Giraudoux, Montherlant, and Camus). Byron was fairly explicit about his intentions: 'Your friend', he writes to Murray (23 August 1821) 'is not aware, that my dramatic simplicity is *studiously* Greek, and must continue so: *no* reform ever succeeded at first. I admire the old English dramatists; but this is quite another field, and has nothing to do with theirs. I want to make a *regular* English drama, *no*, matter whether for the Stage or not, which is not my object,—but a *mental theatre*.' And again, about a month later (20 September) to the same correspondent: 'I am much mortified that Gifford don't take to my new dramas: to be sure, they are as opposite to the Eng-

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lish drama as one thing can be to another; but I have a notion that, if understood, they will in time find favour (though *not* on the stage) with the reader. The Simplicity of plot is intentional, and the avoidance of *rant* also, as also the compression of the Speeches in the more severe situations.' Here again Byron is showing himself the classicist. By a 'regular' English drama, he means a drama that pays strict attention to the dramatic unities. Earlier in this same year Byron had had his passionate controversy with the Rev. W. L. Bowles on the life and writings of Pope. This had driven him to consider in some detail what Mr Bowles had called 'the invariable principles of poetry', and he had reached the remarkable conclusion that Pope 'is the moral poet of all civilization; and as such, let us hope that he will one day be the national poet of mankind. He is the only poet that never shocks; the only poet whose *faultlessness* has been made his reproach.' Now Pope, in the variety of his work, had never attempted drama, and I think it likely that Byron, in order to prove the validity of Pope's ideals in all categories of poetry, had the ambition to fill this niche in the classical façade.

Of the later group of plays, *Cain* is the only one that has received much attention from posterity. The dramatic nature of its theme, in which some reference to Byron's own dilemmas is not far to seek, and its challenge to conventional piety, all contributed to the opinion expressed by Scott—that Byron had 'certainly matched Milton on his own ground'. But that was not Byron's intention, and I doubt if he ever had Milton in mind in the writing of *Cain*, though he afterwards used Milton's example to defend himself against the charge of blasphemy. His aim, as Goethe recognized, was simply to dramatize an incident from the Old Testament; and a similar aim prevailed in his historical dramas, *Sardanapalus* and *The Two Foscari*. The latter Byron himself regarded as his best drama, and it certainly best exhibits the characteristic features

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of his mental theatre—dramatic unity and historical accuracy. To this latter quality Byron attached what may seem to us undue importance; but that was his aesthetic ‘problem’—to take the facts and reduce them to ‘dramatic regularity’. To bring an historical event into sharp dramatic focus seemed to him to offer new possibilities to an outworn convention.

Heaven and Earth seems to be another product of Shelley’s influence—not in its subject-matter, which is again Biblical, but in its choral style. It was never completed. Shelley’s influence is evident again in *The Deformed Transformed*. Shelley thought it was ‘a bad imitation of *Faust*’, and it too was never completed. The last complete drama, *Werner*, is the most curious of all Byron’s works—even its genuineness has been doubted, though without proof.¹ It is difficult to see what attracted Byron to this ‘German’s Tale’ published in Lee’s *Canterbury Tales*; it is a story of murder and violence—‘a son pre-destined to evil by the weakness and sensuality of his father, a father punished for his want of rectitude by the passionate criminality of his son’. One can only suppose that Byron thought it was a good subject to exercise his newly-found talents on, but the result bears all the marks of haste and impatience. Yet the story held some particular fascination for Byron. ‘When I was young,’ he writes in the Preface, ‘(about fourteen I think) I first read this tale, which made a deep impression on me; and may, indeed, be said to contain the germ of much that I have since written.’ With this lead, it might be possible, with diligence, to discover some psychological significance in it all; it would be more difficult to discover any poetic beauty.

During these two years of feverish dramatic activity, there is no doubt that the inner compulsion, which lay behind all

¹ In the *Nineteenth Century*, August 1899, the Hon. F. Leveson Gower attempted to prove that it was written by Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire. E. H. Coleridge effectively refutes this theory in vol. V of *The Works of Lord Byron*.

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his writing, reached its climacteric. It was a bored lover and exhausted poet that set sail for Greece on 13 July 1823 to seek in action the redemption he had not found in thought.

There is at the base of all Byron's work an essential sanity; a hatred of sham and humbug; generous impulses and manly courage. His virtues may not correspond to the conventional code—as I have said, he was a free spirit, and if we cannot all be free spirits, at least it is good that once at least in a generation there should be a poet who rises above the daily conflict of vice and virtue to view the spectacle with cynical humour.

*Pythagoras, Locke, Socrates—but pages
Might be filled up, as vainly as before,
With the sad usage of all sorts of sages,
Who in his life-time, each, was deemed a Bore!
The loftiest minds outrun their tardy ages:
This must they bear with and, perhaps, much more;
The wise man's sure when he no more can share it, he
Will have a firm Post Obit on posterity.*

*If such doom waits each intellectual Giant,
We little people in our lesser way,
In Life's small rubs should surely be more pliant,
And so for one will I—as well I may—
Would that I were less bilious—but, oh, fie on't!
Just as I make my mind up every day,
To be a ‘totus, teres’, Stoic, Sage,
The wind shifts and I fly into a rage.*

*Temperate I am—yet never had a temper;
Modest I am—yet with some slight assurance;
Changeable too—yet somehow ‘Idem semper’:—
Patient—but not enamoured of endurance;*

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*Cheerful—but, sometimes, rather apt to whimper:
Mild—but at times a sort of ‘Hercules furens’:—
So that I almost think that the same skin
For one without—has two or three within.*

These were among the fourteen stanzas of a Seventeenth Canto of *Don Juan* found by Trelawny in Byron's room at Missolonghi. They might well remain as his epitaph.

Appendix

CONCERNING
THE RELATION OF THE PLASTIC ARTS
TO NATURE. 1807

by

FRIEDRICH WILHELM
JOSEPH VON SCHELLING

Translated by Michael Bullock

Festive occasions like today,¹ which, designated by the name of the King, summons all things to feelings of joy with a noble and single-throated rallying-cry, seem, where they can only be celebrated in word and speech, to lead of themselves to the consideration of matters that recall what is most universal and estimable and to link the listeners in spiritual sympathy, just as they are united in the patriotic emotions of the day. For what higher debt do we owe the rulers of the earth than that they grant and preserve us the peaceful enjoyment of all that is excellent and beautiful? So that we cannot think of their benefactions, nor reflect upon the public weal, without our thoughts being immediately conveyed to that which is universally human. Such a festival could hardly be celebrated by a more unanimously experienced delight than by the unveiling and presentation to the public gaze of a true and great work of plastic art; taking into account the fact that this place is dedicated to the sciences alone, the attempt to unveil the essence of works of art as a whole and cause it, as it were, to emerge to the spiritual eye, would seem a no less unifying experience.

How much sensibility, thought and judgment has been expended upon art since long ago! How then could this lecture hope to give the subject a new attraction in such an eminent gathering of the most enlightened connoisseurs and the most penetrating critics, if that subject did not disdain alien embellishment and rather enable the lecture to reckon with some part of the universal favour and acclaim enjoyed by itself! For other subjects have to be exalted by eloquence, or, if there is something extravagant about them, rendered credible by exposition. Art, however, has the advantage of being visibly

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present, so that doubts which may otherwise be voiced as to the validity of the assertion that a perfection exceeding in sublimity the common level has been attained, meet a counter-argument in the fact that, in this domain, what was not apprehended in the idea appears incarnate before the eyes. Of additional assistance to the lecture is the consideration that the many theories formulated about this subject have still made far too little attempt to trace art back to its wellsprings. For most artists, though they are supposed to imitate the whole of nature, seldom achieve a conception of what nature's essence is. But experts and thinkers, on account of nature's greater inaccessibility, generally find it easier to derive their theories from the contemplation of the soul than from a science of nature. Such theories, however, are usually far too superficial; in general, they make a number of statements concerning art which are good and true, but which are ineffectual for the plastic artist and entirely fruitless for his practical work.

For plastic art, according to the most ancient definition, is wordless poetry. Without doubt, the author of this statement meant to imply that, like those spiritual thoughts, it should express ideas whose source is the soul, not, however, by means of speech, but, like silent nature, by configuration, by form, by sensuous works which are independent of it. Plastic art, therefore, manifestly occupies the position of an active link between the soul and nature, and can only be comprehended in the living centre between the two of them. Indeed, since it shares this relation to the soul with every other art, including poetry, that which binds it to nature and constitutes a productive force similar to the latter is the only element which remains its peculiar possession: upon this alone, therefore, can a theory be erected which will satisfy the intelligence and be helpful and profitable to art itself.

For this reason we hope, by looking at plastic art in relation to its true model and fountainhead, nature, to be able to contri-

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bute something as yet unknown to its theory; to provide some more precise definitions or elucidations of concepts; but above all, to make the inter-relationship of the whole structure of art manifest in the light of a higher necessity.

But has not science, then, recognized this relation from the beginning? Indeed, has not every recent theory started from the definite principle that art should imitate nature? This was true enough: but of what avail was this broad general principle to the artist, in view of the ambiguity of the concept nature and the fact that there are almost as many notions of it as there are different modes of living? To the one it is no more than the dead sum of an indefinite quantity of objects, or the space into which he thinks of things as placed, as into a receptacle; to the other it is merely the soil from which he extracts his food and his livelihood; only to the inspired investigator is it the world's holy, eternally creating primal energy, which engenders and actively brings forth all things out of itself. The foregoing principle would be of high significance if it admonished art to emulate this creating energy: but there can be little doubt as to the sense in which it was intended, if one knows the general condition of the sciences at the time of its genesis. It would be strange if just those who denied all life to nature had set it up as a pattern for art. The words of that profound thinker could have applied to them: Your lying philosophy has done away with nature, and why do you demand that we should imitate it? So that you may take fresh pleasure in exercising the same deed of violence upon nature's pupils?²

To them, nature was not merely a dumb, but an absolutely dead image, to which even inwardly no living word was innate: an empty scaffolding of forms of which an equally empty image was to be transferred to the canvas or hewn in stone. This was the right theory for those ancient, crude peoples who, since they saw nothing divine in nature, brought

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forth idols out of it; while to the perceptive Hellenes, who everywhere felt traces of a vitally operative essence, true gods emerged from nature.

And is the pupil of nature supposed then to imitate all and everything in it indiscriminately? He is only supposed to reproduce beautiful objects, and of these only the most beautiful and perfect elements. The principle is thus more closely defined, but this very definition is an assertion that in nature the perfect is mingled with the imperfect, the beautiful with the unbeautiful. Now, how is the man whose relation to nature is solely that of servile imitation to distinguish the one from the other? It is in the nature of an imitator that he more readily assimilates the faults of his original than its merits, because the distinguishing features of the former are more easily grasped and manipulated; and so too we see that, by the imitators of nature in this sense, the ugly has been more frequently and even more lovingly imitated than the beautiful. If we do not look at things in terms of their inner essence, but only in terms of their empty, abstracted form, they in their turn say nothing to our inner being; we must set our own minds, our own spirits in operation before they will answer us. But what is each thing's perfection? Nothing else than the creative life within it, its power to exist. That deep process, similar to the chemical, by which the pure gold of beauty and truth emerges as though refined in the fire will never take place for him in whose eyes the whole of nature seems a dead thing.

There was no alteration in the main aspect of this relation when the inadequacy of the principle began to be more generally felt. Even Johann Winkelmann's splendid institution of a new theory and fresh knowledge made no difference to it. It is true that he re-established the whole operative function of the soul in art and raised it from ignoble dependence into the realm of spiritual liberty. Deeply moved by the forms of the

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plastic arts of antiquity, he taught that the production of an ideal figure, more noble than reality, together with the expression of spiritual ideas, was the highest purpose of art.

If, however, we examine the sense in which this surpassment of nature by art was for the most part understood, we find that even with this theory the view of nature as a mere product, of things as lifelessly existent, persisted and that it in no way served to arouse the notion of nature as living and creating. Thus it remained impossible to animate these ideal forms by any positive knowledge of their essence; and if the forms of reality were dead for the dead observers, those of art were no less so; if the former were incapable of self-active procreation, the latter were so too. The object to be imitated was changed, imitation itself remained. The place of nature was taken by the exalted works of antiquity, whose outward form the pupils were at pains to appropriate, but without the spirit which imbued it. However, these works are just as unapproachable, indeed even more unapproachable than those of nature, they leave you yet colder than the latter if you do not bring to bear upon them the spiritual eye that penetrates their husk and feels the force at work within them.

From the other side, artists since that time have admittedly received a certain ideal impetus and conceptions of a beauty more elevated than the material, but these conceptions were like fine words to which deeds do not conform. If earlier artistic practice produced a body with no soul, this view only taught the secret of the soul, but not that of the body. Theory, as is always the way, rapidly moved over to the opposite side, but it had not yet found the living centre.

Who can say that Winkelmann did not recognize the highest beauty? But with him it appeared only in its separate elements, on the one hand as beauty which is in the idea and flows from the soul, on the other as the beauty of forms. But what actively effectual tie links the two together, or by what

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force are the soul and the body created at the same time and as though with one breath? If this is beyond the capacity of art, as of nature, it is altogether incapable of creating anything. This vital intermediate member Winkelmann did not define; he did not teach the manner in which forms can be generated from the idea. So art went over to that method which we may call the retrogressive, because it strives to proceed from form to essence. However, the absolute is not to be attained after this fashion; it will not be found by mere intensification of the relative. Therefore such works, whose point of departure was form, despite all their competence in respect of the latter, exhibit as a sign of their origin an emptiness that cannot be filled out, in the very place where we expect the consummating, essential and ultimate. The miracle by which the relative was to be raised to the level of the absolute, the human to become divine, remains unachieved; the magic circle is drawn, but the spirit that was to be caught in it does not appear, disobedient to the summons of him who holds creation to be possible through mere form.

Far be it from us, in saying this, to find fault with the spirit of that consummate man himself, whose everlasting doctrine and revelation of the beautiful was rather the motivating than the effecting cause of this tendency in art! Hallowed be his memory to us, as that of all universal benefactors! He stood in sublime solitude, like a range of mountains, throughout his whole period: there was not an answering sound, not a stir of life, not a pulse-beat in the whole broad field of science, that responded to his endeavours.³ Just when his true comrades arrived, this excellent man was taken from the world. And yet how great was his achievement! In mind and spirit he did not belong to his own time, but either to antiquity or to the period whose creator he was, the present. By his teaching he laid the initial foundations of that universal structure of the knowledge and science of antiquity, which later ages have

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begun to erect. He was the first to think of looking at works of art in the light of the modes and laws of the eternal works of nature; before and after him every other human activity has been regarded as arbitrary and not governed by any law and treated accordingly. His spirit came amongst us like a breath from milder climes, sweeping the clouds from the art-sky of antiquity and enabling us today to perceive its stars with a clear eye and unimpeded by obscuring mists. How keenly he felt the emptiness of his own age! Indeed, if we had no other ground than his everlasting feeling for friendship and his inextinguishable longing for its enjoyment, this alone would be sufficient justification for ascribing spiritual love to this consummate man, classical in his life and in his activities. And if he felt a further longing which was not stilled, it was the longing for a more intimate understanding of nature. He himself repeatedly stated to trusted friends, during his later years, that his final reflections would proceed from art to nature⁴—as though he had a presentiment of what was missing and that what he lacked was to perceive the loftiest beauty, which he found in God, in the harmony of the universe as well.

Everywhere nature first confronts us in more or less hard form and closed in. It is like that serious and silent beauty which does not attract attention by clamourous signs, does not catch the common eye. How can we, so to speak, spiritually melt this apparently hard form, so that the unadulterated energy of things fuses with the energy of our spirits, forming a single cast? We must go beyond form, in order to regain it as comprehensible, living and truly felt. If you look at the most beautiful forms, what is there left once you have mentally eliminated the operative principle from them? Nothing but purely inessential qualities, such as extension and spatial relationship. Does the fact that one part of matter is beside and outside the other contribute anything to its inner

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essentiality, or does it rather contribute nothing whatever? Obviously the latter. It is not coexistence that makes form, but the kind of coexistence: this, however, can only be determined by a positive force, which rather runs counter to the existence of things outside one another and subordinates the manifoldness of the parts to the unity of an idea, from the force operating in a crystal to that which, like a gentle magnetic current, gives to the material parts in human constructions such an attitude and position in relation to one another as enables the idea, the essential unity and beauty, to become visible.

But it is not enough for essence in form to be manifest to us as the active principle in general, as spirit and practical science, for us to lay hold of it alive. All unity must be spiritual in kind and derivation, and what is the aim of all investigation of nature if not to find science itself therein? For that which contained no intelligence could not serve as an object for the intelligence either, what was without knowledge could not itself be known. The science by which nature operates is not, of course, one which, like the human, is linked to itself by reflection; in it the idea does not differ from the deed, nor the design from its execution. Hence raw matter tends, so to speak, blindly toward regular shape, and unwittingly assumes purely stereometric forms, which certainly appertain to the realm of ideas and are something spiritual within the material. The most sublime art of number and mensuration is inherent in the stellar system, which performs it in its movements without any notion of it. More distinctly, although beyond their own apprehension, is living knowledge manifest in animals, which we consequently observe achieving numberless effects that are much more splendid than they themselves: the bird which, intoxicated by music, surpasses itself in soulful notes, the little, artistically gifted creature which, without practice or instruction, accomplishes simple architectural works—all,

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however, conducted by a super-powerful spirit that gleams in single flashes of knowledge, but nowhere emerges as the full sun, as in man.

This practical science is, in nature and man, the link between idea and form, between body and soul. Every thing is ministered over by an eternal idea, designed in the infinite intelligence; but through what does this idea enter into reality and physical existence? Solely through creative science, which is just as necessarily linked to the infinite intelligence as, in the artist, that part of his being which apprehends the notion of non-sensuous beauty is linked to that which gives it sensuous representation. If that artist is to be called happy and pre-eminently deserving of praise upon whom the gods have bestowed this creative spirit, so will the work of art appear excellent in the degree to which it shows us this unfalsified natural force of creation and effectiveness contained, as it were, within a single outline.

✓It has long been perceived that not everything in art is the outcome of consciousness, that an unconscious force must be linked with conscious activity and that it is the perfect unanimity and mutual interpenetration of the two which produces the highest art. Works which lack this seal of unconscious science are recognizable by the palpable absence of a life which is autonomous and independent of their creator, while on the contrary, where it is in operation, art simultaneously imparts to its work, with the greatest lucidity of the intelligence, that unfathomable reality by virtue of which it resembles a work of nature. ✓

The dictum that art, to be art, must first withdraw from nature and only return to it in its final consummation, has frequently been offered as an elucidation of the artist's position in relation to nature. It seems to us that the true meaning of this can be no other than the following. In all natural beings the living idea is manifested in blind operation only: if it

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were the same in the artist he would differ in no way from nature. If, however, he were consciously to subordinate himself entirely to nature and reproduce the existent with servile fidelity he would produce masks, but no works of art. Thus, he must withdraw from the product or creature, but only in order to raise himself to the level of creative energy and apprehend it spiritually. This bears him aloft into the realm of pure ideas; he loses the creature, to regain it with thousand-fold interest, and so return, in this sense at least, to nature. The artist ought indeed to emulate this spirit of nature, which is at work in the core of things and in whose speech form and shape are merely symbols, and only insofar as he has apprehended it in living imitation has he himself created something true. For works arising out of the combination of forms which are already beautiful in themselves would be devoid of all beauty, since that which now actually constitutes the beauty of the work or the whole can no longer be form. It is above form, it is essence, the universal, the vision and expression of the indwelling spirit of nature.

There is little room for doubt as to the view to be taken of this prevailing demand for the so-called idealization of nature in art. It seems to spring from a manner of reasoning according to which it is not truth, beauty and goodness, but the opposite of all these that is the real. If the real were indeed the opposite of truth and beauty the artist would not have to exalt or idealize it, but to eliminate and destroy it in order to create something good and beautiful. But how could anything except truth be real, and what is beauty if it is not full and complete existence? Accordingly, what higher purpose could art have either than to depict that which exists in nature and in fact? Or how could it set itself the task of surpassing so-called real nature, since it would be bound always to lag behind the latter? For does it impart sensually real life to its works? This statue does not breathe, is not moved by a pulse-

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beat nor warmed by blood. But both that ostensible superiority and this apparent lagging behind prove to be the outcome of one and the same principle, once we make the purpose of art the portrayal of that which exists. Works of art appear to be endowed with life on the surface only: in nature life seems to penetrate deeper and to be entirely blended with substance. But does not the ceaseless metamorphosis of matter and the universal lot of ultimate dissolution apprise us of the inessentiality of this amalgamation and that it is no intimate fusion? Thus art, by endowing its works with a merely superficial animation, in fact represents as non-existent only that which does not exist. How does it come about that, to everyone whose taste is to some degree educated, imitations of the real which are pushed to the point of illusion appear in the highest degree unreal, making, indeed, the impression of spectres, whereas a work in which the idea is regnant strikes every such observer with the full force of truth and actually transports him for the first time into the genuinely real world? How does this come about, if not through the more or less obscure feeling which tells him that the idea is the only living element in things and all else vain and unsubstantial shadow? The same principle explains all cases brought forward in contradiction of it and quoted as examples of the surpassing of nature by art. If it halts the rapid course of human years, if it links the vigour of masculine prime with the gentle charm of early youth, or shows a mother to her grown-up sons and daughters in the full possession of robust beauty, what else is it doing than eliminating that which is inessential—time? If, as the excellent man of discernment remarked, every natural growth has only one moment of true and consummate existence, we may say that it also has only one moment of complete existence. At this moment it is what it is for all eternity: beyond this its lot is merely a becoming and a passing away. Art, by depicting the creature at this moment, raises it up out

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of time and presents it in its pure being, in the eternity of its life.

Once everything positive and essential had been mentally eliminated from form, it was bound to appear restrictive and, so to speak, hostile to essence, and the same theory which had conjured up the false and feeble ideal inevitably operated in the direction of the formless in art at the same time. In any case, if form were necessarily restrictive to essence it would exist independently of it. But if it exists with and through essence, how could the latter feel restricted by that which it creates itself? Violence might certainly be done to essence by form which was imposed upon it, but never by that which flows out of itself. It is bound rather to rest satisfied in the latter and feel its existence to be autonomous and self-enclosed. Definiteness of form in nature is never a negation but always an affirmation. Generally, of course, you think of a body's shape as a restriction which it undergoes; if, however, you were to turn your attention to creative energy, it would strike you as the bounds which this latter sets itself and within which it appears as a truly meaningful force. For the ability to set one's own bounds is everywhere regarded as an excellence, indeed as one of the highest.

Similarly, most people look upon the single creature as a negative, namely as that which is not the whole or all: the single creature, however, does not subsist through its limitation, but through the energy that inhabits it, by means of which it asserts itself as a whole on its own in relation to the whole.

Since much of the power of singleness, and therefore of individuality as well, is manifested as living character, a negative conception of the former necessarily results in an inadequate and erroneous view of the characteristic in art. Dead and of an unbearable hardness would be the art that aimed to portray the empty husk or limitation of the indi-

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vidual. To be sure, we do not ask for the individual, we ask to see more, namely its living idea. But if the artist recognizes the vision and essence of the idea creating within him and stresses these, he fashions the individual into a world of its own, a genus, an eternal prototype; and whoever has grasped essence need have no fear of hardness and severity either, for they are the precondition of life. Nature, which appears in its consummation as the greatest mildness, we see operating in every single-creature in the direction of definiteness, indeed first and foremost of hardness and self-enclosedness. Just as the whole of creation is a work of the greatest renunciation, so must the artist begin by denying himself and descending into the single-creature, not shunning separateness nor the pain, indeed the torment, of form. From its first works onward nature is entirely characteristic; the energy of fire, the flash of light it imprisons in hard stone and the lovely soul of sound in harsh metal; even at the threshold of life and with organic configuration already planned, it relapses into petrifaction, overcome by the power of form. The life of the plant consists in silent receptiveness; but within what a precise and strict outline is this patient life enclosed. Only with the animal kingdom does the struggle between life and form seem really to commence: its first works it conceals in hard shells, and where these are laid aside the animate world reunites with the realm of crystallization through the art impulse. Finally, it steps forth bolder and freer, and active living characters appear which are the same throughout whole genera. Admittedly, art cannot begin at such a deep level as nature. If beauty is equally distributed everywhere, there are nonetheless various degrees of the manifestation and evolution of the essence and, hence, of beauty: but art demands a certain fullness of beauty, and would like to strike up, not the single sound or note, nor even the separate chord, but the whole choral melody of beauty at once. It therefore prefers to seize

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directly upon that which is highest and most evolved, the human figure. For since it is not given it to encompass the immeasurable whole, and since there appear in all other creatures only single fulgurances, in man alone existence full, entire and bereft of nothing, it is not only permissible but actually incumbent upon it to see the whole of nature in man alone. But just because the latter gathers together everything at one point, it also repeats its whole manifoldness and traverses the same path, along which it has already passed in its broad compass, for the second time in a narrower one. Here then arises the demand upon the artist first to be faithful and truthful in the limited, in order to emerge consummate and beautiful in the whole. Here it is a question of wrestling, not in flaccid and feeble, but in strong and courageous combat, with the creative spirit of nature which, in the human kingdom also, apportions character and stamp in unfathomable manifoldness. Restraining exercise in the recognition of that which renders the singularity of things positive must preserve him from emptiness, flabbiness and inner nothingness; before he dare aim at achieving the extreme of beauty in constructions of the greatest simplicity with infinite content, by means of the ever higher combination and ultimate fusion of manifold forms.

Only by the consummation of form can form be destroyed and this, of course, is the final goal of art in the characteristic. But just as apparent agreement comes more easily to shallow souls than to others, but is inwardly valueless, so is it in art with swiftly achieved outer harmony devoid of the fullness of content, and if theory and teaching have to counteract the spiritless imitation of beautiful forms, they must also combat, above all, the inclination toward flabby, characterless art, whose bestowal of high-sounding titles upon itself merely serves to conceal its inability to fulfil art's basic conditions.

That sublime beauty in which fullness of form does away

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with form itself was assumed by the new theory of art after Winkelmann to be not only the highest, but the only standard. Because the deep foundation on which it rests was overlooked, however, a negative conception even came to be formed of the sum total of everything affirmative. Winkelmann likens beauty to water drawn from the depths of the well, which is esteemed the more wholesome the less flavour it has. It is true that the loftiest beauty is without character; but it is without it in the same manner as we say the universe has no definite dimensions, neither length, breadth nor depth, because it contains them all in the same infinitude, or that the art of creative nature is formless, because the latter is not itself subordinated to any form. In this and no other sense can we say that Greek art in its highest manifestation ascends to the level of the characterless. It does not strive after this directly, however. Only from within the bonds of nature did it first aspire to divine beauty. No carelessly scattered grain, but only a deeply embedded kernel could have been the seed of this heroic growth. Only mighty movements of the feelings, only profound convulsions of the imagination by the all-animating, all-governing forces of nature could have imbued art with the indomitable vigour with which, from the rigidly enclosed earnestness of the constructions of early times to the works of overflowing sensuous charm, it remained ever faithful to truth and begot in the spirit the loftiest reality it is granted mortals to look upon. Just as their tragedy begins with the greatest steadfastness in moral conduct, so the starting point of their sculpture was the earnestness of nature and the stern goddess Athene the one and only muse of plastic art. This period is distinguished by the style which Winkelmann portrays as still harsh and severe, from which the ensuing or high style was only able to develop by the intensification of the characteristic to the point of sublimity and simplicity. In depicting the most perfect or divine characters it was not

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merely necessary for the fullness of forms of which the human character as a whole is capable to be united; this union has also to be of the kind that we can visualize in the universe itself, namely one in which the lower forms, or those related to lesser qualities, were subsumed under higher ones and finally all under one highest form, in which, to be sure, they were all mutually extinguished as particular forms, but endured in their essence and energy. If, therefore, we cannot term this lofty and self-sufficient beauty characteristic, insofar as we understand thereby the restriction or relativity of the phenomenon, nevertheless the characteristic continues to operate indistinguishably, as, in the crystal, although it is transparent, its texture is nonetheless preserved; every characteristic element plays its part, however slight, and contributes to the achievement of the sublime indifference of beauty.

The outward face or basis of all beauty is beauty of form. But since form cannot exist without essence, the presence of character as well can be seen or felt wherever there is form. Hence, characteristic beauty is beauty in its roots, from which alone beauty as fruit can subsequently come into being; essence certainly outgrows form, but even so the characteristic still remains the ever effective fundament of the beautiful.

The most noble man of knowledge, to whom the gods granted nature together with art for his kingdom, likens the characteristic in its relation to beauty to the skeleton in relation to the living figure. Interpreting this apposite simile in our sense, we would say that the skeleton in nature is not separated from the living whole, as in our thoughts of it; that the rigid and the yielding, determining and determined, presuppose one another and can only exist in conjunction, and that on just this account the characteristic is the whole figure derived from the inter-action of bone and flesh, of active and passive. If art too, like nature, at its higher levels represses the initially visible skeletal framework inwards, it can never be

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set in opposition to the figure and to beauty, since it never ceases to play a determining role with regard to both the latter and the former.

But as to whether that lofty and indifferent beauty ought to pass for the only yardstick in art, as it passes for the highest: it seems as though this must depend upon the degree of extension and fullness with which the particular art is able to operate. Nature, in its broader aspect, always presents the higher simultaneously with its lower: creating the divine in man, it effects in all other products the mere substance and basis thereof, so that essence as such shall appear in contrast to it. Indeed, in the higher world of man the great mass once more becomes the fundament to which the divine, that has preserved its purity in the few, is manifested by lawgiving, dominion and the founding of religious faiths. Hence, where art operates with more of the manifoldness of nature it may and must exhibit, alongside the highest measure of beauty, its groundwork and, as it were, the substance of the latter in its own constructions. Here the importance of the nature of the various art-forms is first unfolded. Sculpture, in the more exact sense of the word, disdains to give space to its subject outwardly; it bears it within itself. Just this, however, precludes its wider extension, it is bound to show the beauty of the universe almost at the single point. Therefore it must strive directly after the highest and can only attain manifoldness in isolation and by the strictest elimination of mutually incompatible elements. By detaching the purely animal element in the human character it also succeeds in depicting more lowly creatures as agreeable and even beautiful, as we learn from the beauty of many of the fauns which have come down to us from antiquity; indeed, like the merry spirit of nature parodying itself, it can invert its own ideal and, e.g. in the excess of the statues of Silenus, appear to be released even from the oppression of matter, through its playful an spor-

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tive treatment of the subject. Always, however, it is necessary for it to keep its work entirely isolated, to render it concordant with itself and a world on its own, in that for sculpture there exists no higher unity in which the discordance of the single-element might dissolve. On the other hand, painting is more comparable in its compass with the world, and more capable of creating poetry in epic extension. In all Iliad there is even room for a Thersites, and what does not find a place in the great heroic poem of nature and history! Here the single-element scarcely counts on its own; it is replaced by the whole, and what would not be beautiful in its own right becomes so through the harmony of the whole. If, in an extended work of painting that links its shapes by the distribution of space and by light and shade, the highest canons of beauty were applied everywhere, this would result in the most unnatural monotony, since, as Winkelmann says, the loftiest idea of beauty is everywhere one and the same and permits few divergences. The single-element would then be given preference over the whole instead of being subordinated to it wherever the latter arises out of a multiplicity. Hence, in a work of this kind, gradations of beauty must be observed, which alone render the full beauty concentrated in the centre visible and enable an equipoise in the whole to proceed from an over-emphasis on the single-element. Here then is the place for the restricted characteristic as well, and theory at least ought not to direct the painter as much towards that narrow space which concentrically collects everything beautiful, as towards the characteristic manifoldness of nature, through which alone he can import to a great work the full weight of living content. Thus, amongst the originators of the new art, thought the glorious Leonardo, thus the master of lofty beauty, Raphael, who did not shrink from depicting it in its lesser measure also, rather than appear monotonous, lifeless and unreal; he understood not only how

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to bring forth living beauty, but even how to break up its uniformity by variety of expression.

For although character can also be expressed in rest and equilibrium, it is only in action that it becomes truly alive. By character we understand a unity of several forces that continually holds these components in a certain counterpoise and within definite bounds, to which, if it is undisturbed, a similar counterpoise in the proportion of forms corresponds. But this living unity can show itself in action and activity only as the result of the forces composing it being incited to rebellion by some cause or other and departing from their equilibrium. Everyone acknowledges this to be the case with the passions.

Here we come upon that well-known theoretical precept which demands that the real outburst of passion shall be as far as possible moderated, in order not to violate beauty of form. We, however, believe it necessary rather to invert this precept and express it by saying that passion ought to be moderated precisely by beauty itself. For it is very much to be feared that the moderation thus demanded will also be negatively understood, since the true requirement is rather to oppose passion by a positive force. For just as virtue does not consist in the absence of passions, but in the power of the spirit over them, so beauty is not safeguarded by their removal or reduction but by the power of beauty over them. The forces of passion must therefore really show; it must be evident that they could rebel utterly, but are held down by the power of character and break on the forms of firmly grounded beauty, as break the waves of a mighty river that rises just to the level of its banks, but cannot overflow them. Otherwise this enterprise of moderation would merely resemble that of the shallow moralists who, in order to cope with man, prefer to mutilate nature in him and have so thoroughly eliminated everything positive from his actions that the people gloat over

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the spectacle of great crimes, in order to enliven themselves with the sight at least of something positive.

In nature and art, essence first strives for the realization or representation of itself in the single-creature. Hence, the greatest severity of form is exhibited in the beginnings of both; for without bounds the boundless could not be manifested; if there were no harshness, mildness could not exist, and if unity is to be made palpable this can only be done through singularity, isolation and conflict. Initially, therefore, the creative spirit makes its appearance entirely lost in form, inaccessible, enclosed and austere even in the large. But the more it succeeds in uniting its whole fullness within one creature, the more it gradually abates its severity, and where it fully accomplishes form, so that it rests therein and is the complete expression of itself, it grows lighthearted, so to speak, and begins to move in gentle lines. This is the condition of the most beautiful maturity and bloom, where the pure vessel stands consummate, the spirit of nature is liberated from its bonds and feels its kinship with the soul. Like a gentle dawn suffusing the whole figure, it announces the approaching soul; it is not yet there, but everything makes ready to receive it by the quiet play of gentle movements: the rigid outlines melt and grow soft; a lovely essence that is neither sensual nor spiritual, but inapprehensible, spreads over the figure and clings to all the outlines and to every motion of the limbs. This essence, inapprehensible as we stated, and yet perceptible to everyone, is what the Greeks termed *charis* and what we know as charm.

Where charm is manifested in fully worked out form, the work is perfected from the viewpoint of nature, nothing more is wanting, all demands are satisfied. Here too soul and body are in perfect concord; the body is form, charm is the soul, though not soul *per se*—but the soul of form or the natural soul.

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Art may pause and remain stationary at this point, for from one viewpoint at least its task is fulfilled. The pure image of beauty arrested at this stage is the goddess of love. But the beauty of the soul *per se*, blended with sensuous charm: this is the highest apotheosis of nature.

The spirit of nature is only apparently opposed to the soul; *per se*, however, the instrument of its revelation: it indeed effects the antithesis of things, but only in order that the single essence, as the highest clemency and reconciliation of all forces, may come forth. All other creatures are propelled by the mere spirit of nature and through it assert their individuality; in man alone, as in the centre, does the soul make its appearance, without which the world, like nature, would be without the sun.

Thus, in man, the soul is not the principle of individuality, but that whereby he raises himself above all egoism, whereby he becomes capable of self-sacrifice, unselfish love and, the most exalted of all, of the contemplation and cognizance of the essence of things and, precisely thereby, of art. It is no longer concerned with matter, nor does it have direct dealings with the latter, but only with the spirit as the life of things. Manifested in the body as well, it is nonetheless free of the body, the consciousness of which in it, in the most beautiful constructions, merely hovers like a faint dream that leaves it undisturbed. It is no quality, no capacity, nor anything of that sort in particular; it does not know, but it is knowledge, it is not good, but it is goodness, it is not beautiful, as the body too may be, but it is beauty itself.

Of course, at first or initially the soul of the artist is exhibited in the work of art by invention in the single-element; and in the whole when it soars above it in calm repose. It ought, however, to become visible in that which is portrayed; as the primal energy of thought, when human beings, utterly filled by an idea, are set before a noble meditation; or as

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inherent, essential goodness. Both find clear expression in a static condition as well, but a more living one when the soul can reveal itself in action and opposition; and because it is mainly the passions that disrupt the tranquillity of existence, it is generally assumed that beauty of soul is pre-eminently shown by calm power in the storm of passion.

Only an important distinction has to be made here. For the soul must not be called upon to moderate those passions which are merely the revolt of inferior natural spirits; nor can it be shown in opposition to them; for where reflection is still wrestling with these, the soul has not yet made its appearance at all; these passions must be moderated by the very nature of man, by the power of the spirit. Only there are loftier cases, in which it is not a single force, but the reflective soul itself that bursts all dams; indeed, there are cases where the soul, through the ties which link it to sensual existence, is subjected to the pain that should be alien to its divine nature, where man feels himself attacked and assaulted in the roots of his life, not by mere natural forces, but by moral powers, where guiltless error drags him into iniquity and thereby into misfortune, and deeply felt injustice calls the most hallowed emotions of humanity to insurrection. This is the case in all situations which are truly and in the sublime sense tragic, such as those presented to our eyes by the tragedies of antiquity. When blindly passionate energies are aroused, the reflective spirit is at hand as the guardian of beauty; but when the spirit itself is carried away as though by an irresistible force, what power remains on watch over it to safeguard holy beauty? Or when the soul as well is involved in suffering, how is it to save itself from pain and from defilement?

Arbitrarily to restrain the energy of pain and of insurgent emotion would be a sin against the meaning and purpose of art and would betray a lack of feeling and soul in the artist himself. By the mere fact that beauty founded upon large

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and solid forms has become character, art has provided itself with the means of showing the whole magnitude of feeling without violating proportion. For where beauty rests upon mighty forms as upon immovable pillars, even a slight alteration of its relationships, which leaves the latter undisturbed, enables us to conclude how great was the force needed to bring it about. Still more does charm sanctify pain. Its essence consists in its not knowing itself; but just as it is not arbitrarily achieved, no arbitrary action can cause its loss either: when unbearable pain, or even madness ordained by punitive gods takes away consciousness and the power of thought, it still stands beside the suffering figure as a protective daemon and sees to it that he does nothing inept, nothing contrary to humanity, but that when he falls he at least falls as a pure and undefiled victim. Not yet the soul itself, but its prefiguration, it brings about by a natural effect what the former achieves by divine power, by transmuting pain, benumbedness and even death itself into beauty.

Nevertheless, this charm that is maintained in the most extreme calamity would be dead if unillumined by the soul. But what expression can accrue to it in this situation? It makes its escape from pain and steps forth victorious, not vanquished, by abandoning its ties with sensual existence. The spirit of nature may marshall its forces for the latter's preservation, the soul takes no part in this struggle; but its very presence allays the storms of the painfully struggling life. No external power can do more than take away external goods, it cannot reach the soul; it can tear apart a finite link, but not dissolve the everlasting bond of a truly divine love. Not hard and devoid of feeling, or abandoning love itself, it rather shows the latter in pain alone, as the feeling which outlives sensual existence and so ascends above the ruins of the outer life or happiness in divine glory.

This is the expression of the soul which the creator of

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Niobe has shown us in his picture. All the means of art calculated to moderate the horrific have here been set in operation. Mightiness of forms, sensuous charm and even the very nature of the subject soften the expression by the fact that pain, passing beyond all expression, annuls itself again, and beauty, which it seemed impossible to save alive, is preserved from violation by the nascent petrifaction. Nonetheless, what would it all be without the soul and how is the latter revealed? In the mother's countenance we do not only see grief for those of her children who already lie like broken blossoms, nor only terror for the salvation of those that remain and of the youngest daughter, who is seeking refuge at her bosom, and not indignation against the cruel deities, least of all cold defiance, as has been alleged; we see all this, but not by itself, for through grief, fear and indignation there radiates, like a divine light, everlasting love—the only abiding thing—and in this the mother is proved, not to have been, but to be *now* of such a quality as to remain bound to the beloved by an everlasting bond.

Everyone admits that the soul's greatness, purity and goodness have their sensuous expression as well. How would this be conceivable, if the principle operating in matter were not also an essence cognate and similar to the soul? In the portrayal of the soul there are once more levels of art, according as to whether it is bound up with the merely characteristic, or visibly merges with sweetness and charm.⁵ Who does not perceive that in the tragedies of Aeschylus that exalted morality already holds sway, which is indigenous to the works of Sophocles? But in the former instance it is still enclosed in a rough husk and participates less in the whole, because it still lacks the link of sensuous charm. Out of this austerity and the still awesome graces of the earlier art, it was nevertheless possible for Sophoclesian charm to come into being, and with it that perfect fusion of both elements which leaves us in doubt

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as to whether it is moral grace or sensuous charm that most delights us in the work of this poet. Precisely the same is true of the sculptural productions in the still austere style, in comparison with those in the subsequent gentle manner.

If charm, besides being the transfiguration of the spirit of nature, is also the medium which binds together moral goodness and sensuous appearance, it becomes self-evident that it is the central point towards which art must work from all directions. This beauty, which arises from the perfect permeation of moral goodness with sensuous charm, grips and delights us, wherever we find it, with the power of a miracle. For because the spirit of nature everywhere else appears independent of the soul, and even somewhat in conflict with it, it seems here to blend with the soul as though by virtue of a voluntary accord and the inner fire of divine love; with sudden clarity there comes upon the beholder remembrance of the original unity of the essence of nature with the essence of the soul: the certainty that all antithesis is only apparent, and that love is the tie between all beings and pure goodness the fundament and content of the whole of creation.

Here art passes beyond itself, as it were, and makes itself once more a medium. Upon this peak sensuous charm too becomes once more merely the husk and body of a higher life; what was previously a whole is treated as a part, and the loftiest relation of art to nature is attained by its making the latter a means of rendering visible the soul within it.

But if in this flower of art, as in the flower of the vegetable kingdom, all earlier stages are repeated, it may also be seen, on the other hand, what variety of directions art may follow in departing from this central point. In particular, the natural divergence of the two forms of plastic art here shows up in its full effectiveness. For it seems that for sculpture, since it represents its ideas by corporeal things, the highest achievement perforce consists in the perfect equipoise between soul and

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matter; if places too much weight on the latter it sinks down beneath its own idea; it seems, however, to be impossible for it to exalt the soul at the expense of matter, in that to do so it would have to outstrip itself. The perfect sculptor will indeed, as Winkelmann says à propos the Belvedere Apollo, not take more matter for his work than he needs for the accomplishment of his spiritual purpose, but vice versa he will also not place more power in the soul than is simultaneously expressed in matter; for his art rests precisely on the complete corporeal expression of the spiritual. Hence sculpture can only reach its true peak in those characters which, by their conception, are always in reality everything that they are in idea or soul, that is, in divine characters. Even if it had not been preceded by mythology, therefore, it would have come upon gods by itself and have invented gods if it had not found them. Since, moreover, the spirit has at a deeper level again the same relation to matter that we have ascribed to the soul, in that it is the principle of activity and movement, as matter is that of rest and inactivity, the law of the moderation of expression and of passion is a basic law flowing from its nature; but this law is valid, not merely for the baser, but precisely also for what we may perhaps style the loftier and more divine passions, of which the soul is capable in rapture, in devotion and in adoration; hence, because the gods alone are released from these passions as well, it is attracted from this side also to the imaging of divine characters.

Painting, however, seems quite differently circumstanced to sculpture. For the former does not represent by means of corporeal things like the latter, but by light and colour, that is by noncorporeal and, to some extent, spiritual media; also, it does not present its images as being the objects themselves, but expressly wishes them to be looked upon as images. By its very nature, therefore, it lays less stress upon matter than sculpture, and for this reason it seems, in spite of raising sub-

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stance above spirit, to be able with impunity to sink deeper below itself than could sculpture in the same case and, on the other hand, to lay with all the greater warrant a distinct over-emphasis on the soul. Where it strives after the most exalted, it will in any case ennable the passions by character or moderate them by charm, or show the power of the soul in them; on the other hand, however, precisely those loftier passions which depend upon the soul's kinship with a supreme being are fully adapted to its nature. Indeed, if sculpture effects a perfect counterbalance between the force by which a being exists outwardly and functions in nature and that by which it lives inwardly and as a soul, and excludes mere passion even from matter, so, on the other hand, may painting reduce the character of energy and activity in the latter to the advantage of the soul, transmuting it into that of submission and sufferance, through which it seems that man became more receptive to the promptings of the soul and of loftier influences in general.

This antithesis alone is sufficient to explain not only the inevitable paramountcy of sculpture in antiquity and of painting in modern times, in that the former had an entirely sculptural outlook as well, while the latter make the soul itself into the suffering organ of higher E^velations; this also demonstrates that to strive after the sculptural in form and portrayal does not suffice, and that it is necessary above all to think and feel sculpturally, i.e. in the antique manner, as well. But if the debauching of sculpture into the painterly is a corruption of art, so the retrenchment of painting within the preconditions and forms of sculpture is to impose an arbitrary limitation upon it. For if the former, like weight, operates upon one point, so may painting, like light, fill creatively the whole universe.

Proof of this boundless universality of painting is history itself and the example of the greatest masters, who, without violating the essence of their art, brought each of its particular

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stages to consummation for themselves, so that we can rediscover in the history of art also the same sequence that we have been able to demonstrate in the subject itself..

Not exactly in time, to be sure, but certainly in fact.[§] For thus the oldest and most powerful epoch of liberated art is represented by Michelangelo, the epoch in which it exhibits its still untrammelled energies in monstrous births: as, according to the poetic myths of the allegorical primeval world, after the embrace of Uranus the earth first brought forth Titans and heaven-storming giants, before it produced the gentle realm of tranquil gods. Similarly, the work of The Last Judgement, with which as by the sum total of his art that gigantic spirit filled the Sistine Chapel, seems reminiscent of the first period of the earth and its births, rather than of the later one. Drawn for the most mysterious reasons to the organic and particularly to the human shape, he does not avoid the frightful, indeed he intentionally seeks it and rouses it from its rest in the sombre workshops of nature. Lack of tenderness, charm and agreeableness he counterbalances by extreme vigour, and if by his depictions he excites horror, it is the terror which, according to the fable, the ancient god Pan spreads when he appears amidst the gatherings of men. As a rule nature brings forth the extraordinary by the isolation and exclusion of opposite qualities: so in Michelangelo earnestness and profound natural energy must have predominated over the soul's taste for charm and feeling, to show the highest achievement of purely sculptural vigour in the painting of recent times.

After the initial violence and the forceful impulse of birth have relaxed, the spirit of nature is transfigured into soul and grace is born. Art attained this stage, after Leonardo da Vinci, through Correggio, in whose works the sensuous soul is the effective basis of beauty. This is visible not only in the soft outlines of his figures; but also in their shapes, which most

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closely resemble those of the purely sensuous characters in the works of antiquity. In him flowers the true golden age of art, which granted earth the gentle dominion of Kronos: here playful innocence, gay desire and childlike pleasure smile out of open and cheerful countenances and here the Saturnalia of art are celebrated. The total expression of that sensuous soul is chiaroscuro, which Correggio developed further than anyone else. For to the artist the representative of matter is the dark; and this is the substance to which he must attach the fleeting apparition of light and of the soul. Thus, the more dark fuses with light, so that the two of them become one essence and, as it were, one body and one soul, the more the spiritual is manifested corporeally and the more the corporeal is elevated to the level of the spirit.

After the confines of nature have been overcome and the monstrous, the fruit of the initial liberty, suppressed and shape and form beautified by the presentiment of the soul: the heavens brighten, the softened earthly is able to merge with the heavenly and the latter, in turn, with the gently human. Raphael takes possession of serene Olympus and leads us with him away from earth into the concourse of the gods, of the abiding, blessed beings. The flower of life at its most cultivated and the fragrance of phantasy, together with the savour of the spirit, breathe in unison from his works. He is no longer a painter, he is a philosopher, a poet at the same time. Beside the power of his spirit stands wisdom, and as he portrays things, so they are ordered in eternal necessity. In him art has reached its goal, and because the pure equipoise of divine and human can hardly exist at more than one point, the seal of uniqueness is set upon his works.

From here painting, to fulfil all its potentialities, could continue to move toward one side only, and no matter what was attempted during the later revival of art nor in what directions it tested itself, only one man seems to have succeeded in

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concluding the cycle of the great masters with a kind of necessity. As the new fable of Psyche concludes the cycle of the old stories of the gods, so painting was able, by virtue of the pre-eminence it gave to the soul, to attain a new, if not higher, level of art. This was the aim of Guido Reni, who became the true painter of the soul. This, it seems to us, is the interpretation which must be placed upon his whole endeavour, which was often uncertain and, in many of his works, lost itself in the indefinite, an interpretation better calculated than most others, perhaps, to provide the key to his art, which is exhibited to universal admiration in the great collection of our king. In the figure of the Virgin being taken up to heaven every element of sculptural harshness and severity has been eliminated, down to the last trace; indeed, does it not seem that in this picture painting itself, like liberated Psyche, soars aloft on its own pinions toward transfiguration? Here there is no essence subsisting outward with resolute natural energy; everything about it expresses receptiveness and passive endurance, including that impermanent flesh whose quality is styled in Italian *morbidezza* and which is quite different from that with which Raphael clothes the descending queen of heaven, as she appears to the adoring pontiff and a saint.

Although there is, of course, foundation for the remark that the prototype of Guido's female head is the Niobe of antiquity, the reason for this similarity certainly does not consist in a merely arbitrary imitation; a similar objective may, perhaps, have lead to similar means. If the Florentine Niobe is an extreme achievement of sculpture and the sculptural representation of the soul, then the picture we know well is an extreme achievement of painting, which here dares to lay aside its need of shadow and dark and to operate almost with pure light.

If painting may be permitted, on account of its particular

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constitution, to place a distinct over-emphasis on the soul, theory and teaching will nevertheless do best always to guide it toward that original centre, from which alone art can forever be regenerated, whereas at the last mentioned stage it would perforce either stand still or degenerate into circumscribed mannerism. For even this exalted suffering conflicts with the notion of a consummate, vigorous being, whose image and reflection art is called upon to exhibit. Correct taste will always delight in seeing a being depicted in its individual aspect as well, worthily and as autonomously as possible; indeed, the Deity would look down with pleasure upon a creature that, gifted with a pure soul, also vigorously asserted the loftiness of its nature outward and through its sensuously effectual existence.

We have seen how the work of art arises out of the profundity of nature,⁷ growing up with definition and limitation, unfolds inner infinitude and fullness, is finally transfigured into charm, and last of all attains to soul; but it is necessary to imagine in isolation that which, in the creative act of the art that has reached maturity, is a single deed. No doctrine or instructions can produce this spiritual generative power. It is the pure gift of nature, which here brings itself to a second conclusion, realizing itself completely by vesting its creative power in the creature. But just as, in the broad course of art, these stages appeared in succession, till at the highest they all became one, so in the single instance a well-fashioned work of art can only come into being where it has risen into flower from seed and root, according to the laws of its development.

The demand that art, like every other living thing, must set out from its first beginnings and to renew its vitality must always return to them afresh, may appear a harsh doctrine in an age that has been so often told how it can appropriate the most refined beauty ready-made from existing works of art,

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and thus reach its ultimate goal at one step. Do we not already possess the excellent and the consummate and why should we go back to the primitive and unrefined? If the great authors of the newer art had thought like this, we should never have come to see their miracles. They too had before them the creations of the ancients, pieces of sculpture in the round and sublime works of low relief, which they could have translated directly into paintings.⁸ But this expropriation of a beauty not won by itself and therefore also unintelligible, did not satisfy an art impulse which went entirely to the original and out of which the beautiful was to be regenerated in liberty and primordial vigour. Hence, it did not hesitate to appear plain, artless and dull by the side of those sublime ancients, and to enclose art in an insignificant looking bud until the time of charm was come. Why else do we still regard these works of the old masters, from Giotto to the teacher of Raphael, with a kind of reverence and even a certain predilection, than because the fidelity of their endeavour and the great seriousness of their calm, voluntary restrictedness compel our respect and admiration? The present generation bears the same relation to them as they do to the ancients. No living tradition, no bond of organically continuous cultural growth links their age to ours: to become their equals we must re-create art along their path, but with our own energy. Even that Indian summer of art at the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth century was able to conjure up a few fresh blooms on the old stem, but no fertile seeds, and still less itself to plant a new stem of art. But to put away the consummate works of art and seek out its still plain and simple beginnings, in order to imitate them, as some have wished to do, would be merely a fresh and perhaps still greater misapprehension; they themselves would not be a return to the original, the very plainness would be affectation and become a hypocritical pretence.

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But what prospect does the present age offer for an art grown up out of a fresh kernel and from the roots? This is indeed largely dependent upon the taste of its time, and who would care to promise such earnest beginnings the approval of the present, in which, on the one hand, it hardly achieves an equal valuation with other instruments of prodigal exuberance, while on the other, artists and art-lovers, totally incapable of grasping nature, praise and demand the ideal?

✓ Art springs from the vivid movement of the innermost energies of the mind and spirit, which we term inspiration. Everything that has grown from difficult or small beginnings to great might and grandeur became great through inspiration. It is the same with kingdoms, states, arts and sciences. This, however, is not accomplished by the energy of the individual, but by the spirit which is diffused through the whole. For art in particular is dependent upon the public mood, as the more delicate plants are upon air and weather; it requires a universal enthusiasm for sublimity and beauty, like that which, in the times of the Medici, evoked all the great spirits at once and on the spot like a warm breath of spring, a state of affairs such as Pericles depicts in the eulogy of Athens, and which is more safely and lastingly preserved for us by the clement overlordship of a paternal regent than by a democratic government; in which every energy stirs of its own free will and every talent shows itself with pleasure, because each is esteemed solely for its worth; where inactivity is a disgrace, the petty wins no acclaim and the goal to which all strive is set high and beyond the commonplace. Only when public life is motivated by those forces which give rise to art can the latter benefit from it; for it cannot take its direction from anything external without relinquishing the nobility of its nature. Both art and science can only revolve around their own axes; like every spiritual worker, the artist can only obey the law which God and nature have inscribed in his heart, and

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no other. No one can aid him, he must aid himself; similarly too, he can receive no external reward, since anything that he did not bring forth for its own sake would immediately be valueless; for this same reason, no one can command him nor prescribe the path he should follow. If he is worthy of pity when he struggles with his epoch, he deserves contempt if he panders to it. And how could he do this, in any case? Without great universal enthusiasm there are only sects, no public opinion. Not a firmly established taste, not the large conceptions of a whole people, but the voices of individual, arbitrarily cast up judges decide merit, and art, that is self-sufficient in its majesty, woos applause and becomes subservient where it should rule.

A different inspiration falls to the lot of different epochs. Can we not expect one for this age, since the new world now in the process of formation, as it is already present partly outwardly and partly inwardly and in the mind, can no longer be measured by the yardsticks of previous opinion and everything loudly demands a larger scale and announces a complete revival? To try to draw sparks from burnt-out ashes and kindle from them a universal blaze is a vain endeavour. But no more than a change in ideas themselves is required to lift up art out of its lassitude; no more than fresh knowledge and new belief capable of inspiring it to the work whereby it might manifest, in a rejuvenated life, a splendour resembling that which is past. To be sure, an art the same in all respects as that of past centuries will never come again; for nature never repeats itself. A Raphael of that particular kind will never again exist, but there will be another who has attained to the highest level of art in the same original manner. Only let that basic precondition be not lacking and the re-awakened art, like its predecessor, will show its destined goal in its first works: if it sets forth differently from a fresh primal energy, charm will already be present, even though veiled, in its

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fashioning of the defined characteristic, and in both the soul will be already preordained. Works which arise after this manner are necessary and eternal, even in their initial imperfection.

We may as well confess that in this hope for the rebirth of an absolutely original art, it is pre-eminently the fatherland we have in view. Even at the time when art was re-awakened in Italy, the vigorous growth of the art of our great Albrecht Dürer sprang forth first from out of our own soil; how typically German, and yet how akin to that whose sweet fruits the gentler sun of Italy brought to perfect maturity. This nation, from which proceeded the revolution of thought in the new Europe, to whose intellectual power the greatest inventions bear witness, which has given laws to the heavens and whose investigations have penetrated most deeply into the earth, in whom nature has implanted more deeply than in any other a steadfast feeling for the right and an inclination toward the recognition of first causes, this nation must reach its conclusion in an original art.

If the destinies of art are dependent upon the general destinies of the human spirit, with what hopes we may look upon the immediate future of our fatherland, in which a noble regent has given liberty to human intelligence, wings to the spirit and effectiveness to humanitarian ideas, while sterling peoples still preserve the living seeds of the old artistic talent, and with him the famous seats of old German art have been united. Indeed, the very arts and sciences, if they were everywhere proscribed, would seek sanctuary in the protection of the throne, upon which clement wisdom holds the sceptre, which loveliness beautifies as queen, which the hereditary love of art glorifies and has rendered the young prince, who has been acclaimed during the last few days by the vociferous rejoicing of a grateful people, the admiration of foreign nations. Here they would find scattered everywhere the seeds

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of a future vigorous existence, here already-tried public spirit and, firmly established amidst the changing times, at least the bond of one love and one universal enthusiasm, that for the fatherland and for the king, for whose salvation and preservation to the ultimate goal of human years no more fervent wishes can go up in any temple than in this one, which *He* built for the sciences.

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NOTES

¹ This lecture was delivered on the king's name-day, 12th October, 1806, in the Academy of Sciences at Munich. The footnotes were added when it was reprinted in the *Philosophic Papers*, Vol. I, Landshut, 1809.

² The words of J. G. Hamann in the *Trilogy of Hellenistic Letters* II, toned down in the context of the present lecture, for they run as follows in the original text: 'Your philosophy of murderous lies has done away with nature, and why do you demand that we should imitate the latter? So that you may find fresh pleasure in becoming murderers of nature's pupils also?'—Would that he to whom the author owes his first detailed acquaintance with the writings of that primitively vigorous spirit, J. H. Jacobi, would either himself undertake the long-awaited publication of Hamann's works or hasten it by his word!

³ Winkelmann is alone in the whole of his era in the objectivity, not only of his style, but of his whole way of looking at things. There is a type of mind which thinks *about* things, and another which seeks to know them in themselves, according to their pure necessity. Of this latter type Winkelmann's history of art provided the first example; only later did this spirit show itself in other sciences as well, and then in the face of strong opposition from those otherwise accustomed. The former way is the easiest.—Winkelmann's own epoch knew great thinkers only along those lines, with the exception of Hamann, whom we have just mentioned. But is the latter really to be considered as belonging to his epoch, during which he remained uncomprehended and without effect? Lessing, the only man of that period who can be named alongside Winkelmann, is great by virtue of the fact, that in the complete subjectivity of the time and although he developed his highest masterliness precisely in thinking about things, he nevertheless inclined longingly, even if unconsciously, toward the other mode of approach, not only in his recognition of Spinozism, but in many other trends, notably concerning the education of man. But the author has always felt obliged to regard as prejudiced the view that Lessing was always of one and the same mind and opinion as Winkelmann regarding the highest

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purpose of art.—Listen to the following fragment from Lessing: ‘The proper determinant of a fine art can only be that which it is capable of bringing into being without the aid of any other. In painting, this is physical beauty.—In order to be able to bring together physical beauties of more than one kind, artists hit upon historical painting.—The expression, the representation of history was not the painter’s ultimate purpose. History was merely a means, his ultimate purpose to attain manifold beauty.—The new painters clearly make the means into the purpose. They paint historical events for the sake of painting historical events, overlooking the fact that, by so doing, they are reducing their art to an auxiliary of other arts and sciences, or at least rendering the other arts and sciences such indispensable auxiliaries to their own as to entirely deprive it of the value of a primary art.—Expression of physical beauty is the determinant of painting.—The highest physical beauty is therefore its highest determinant etc.’ (From *Lessing’s Thoughts and Opinions*, collected by Friedrich Schlegel, Vol. I, p. 292.) That Lessing, with his tendency to clear-cut division, could conceive and insist upon a purely *physical* beauty is understandable; at a pinch also, that he could convince himself that after the elimination of that aim, the depiction of manifold physical beauty, there would be nothing left to historical painting but precisely—*the representation of history*. But if it is possible to bring Winkelmann’s teaching, as contained especially in his history of art (the *Monumenti inediti* were written for the Italians and do not possess the same authentic value as the former), into harmony with these assertions of Lessing’s; if, in particular, it can be demonstrated as Winkelmann’s opinion that the portrayal of actions and passions, in brief the loftiest *genre* in painting, was only discovered as a vehicle for showing a variation of physical beauty, then the author must confess to having understood nothing about Winkelmann, nothing whatsoever. It will always be interesting to compare the *Laocoön*, as the most brilliant exposition on art in the above sense, with the works of Winkelmann in respect of the inner and outer style of the two authors; the complete diversity of their mental approach to a subject must then be obvious to everyone.

⁴ Vide, e.g., the *Dasdorf Correspondence*, Vol. II, p. 235.

⁵ Now, in the portrayal of the soul there are once more two levels of art: the first, in which it is still present as an indistinguishable element, more *per se* than in full realization; the other, in which it visibly fuses with sweetness and charm. (First edition.)

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⁶ Actually, what has been stated here could also be vindicated as a consequence of time, if space permitted more detailed proof. For it may easily be recalled that the work of the Last Judgement was not begun till after Raphael's death. But Michelangelo's style was born with him and accordingly was earlier than Raphael in time also. Even without giving more credit than they deserve to the usual stories of the effect of the sight of Michelangelo's first Roman works on the young Raphael, or attributing to coincidence the fact that the latter developed from an initially still irresolute style to the boldness and greatness of consummate art, it is nevertheless irrefutable, not only that Michelangelo's style was one of the bases of Raphael's art, but that through it the whole of art first rose to full liberty.—Of Correggio it should perhaps be said with less ambiguity: 'Through him flowered the true golden age in art', though no one will readily misunderstand or mistake the meaning of what the author has said in relation to his opinion as to what is really the highest achievement of the more recent art.

⁷ The whole of this treatise demonstrates that the foundations of art, and hence of beauty as well, lie in the vitality of nature; as is well known, the public critics of contemporary philosophy are always better acquainted with its theory than its originators. Thus we learned of such an expert, through the medium of an otherwise highly esteemed periodical, that according to the latest aesthetics and philosophy—(a vast concept, under which notable demi-experts lump together everything unpleasing, presumably so that they may the more easily throw it overboard)—there is only artistic beauty, but no natural beauty. Now, we should like to enquire whereabouts in the latest philosophy and its aesthetics such an assertion is to be found; did we not, at this instant, recall what concept judges of this sort are prone to attach to the word nature, especially in art. In any case, the aforementioned critic means no harm even with this opinion; rather is he seeking to bring succour to the latest philosophy himself, by a strict proof in its own manner of speech and terminology. Let us listen to the excellent proof! 'The beautiful is the manifestation of the divine in the earthly, of the infinite in the finite. Now it is true that nature also is a manifestation of the divine, but nature—which has been since the beginning of time and will be till the end of days, as this well-informed person puts it in greater detail—does not manifest itself to the human spirit and only in its infinitude is it beautiful.' However we understand this infinitude, there remains the contradiction that, although beauty is the manifes-

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tation of the infinite in the *finite*, nature is supposed to be beautiful only in its infinitude. However, in doubt of himself, the connoisseur raises the objection that each individual part of a beautiful work is itself 'beautiful, e.g. the hand or foot of a beautiful statue. But (in this manner he resolves his doubts) where do we find the hand or the foot of *such a colossus* (namely nature)? With this the philosophic connoisseur reveals the value and sublimity of his conception of the infinitude of nature. He finds it in immeasurable extension. That there is a true, essential infinitude in every part of matter is an exaggeration which this petty fellow certainly does not go so far as to assert, even if he does speak the language of the latest philosophy. And nothing short of mental aberration could enable one even to think that man, for instance, might indeed be more than merely nature's hand and foot—rather its eye—but that, quite apart from this, its hand and foot might very probably be discovered. Accordingly, the question itself may not have seemed to him sufficiently annihilating and real philosophic effort only begins at this point. It is admittedly true, opines this excellent person, that every single-thing in nature is a manifestation of the eternal and divine,—which must mean in this single-thing?—but the divine is not manifested *as* divine, but as earthly and perishable.—This is philosophical virtuosity indeed! As the shadows in a shadow-play come and go at the commands appear and avaunt, so is the divine manifested in the earthly at one moment and the next moment not manifested in it, at the will of the artist. But this is only the prelude to an ensuing chain of conclusions, whose links are worthy of special consideration. (1) 'The single-thing represents nothing but an image of becoming and passing away—and not the idea of becoming and passing away, but an example of it through the fact that it becomes and passes away.' (Thus, a *beautiful* painting might also be said to represent an example of becoming and passing away, for it too only gradually begins to acquire its chromatic mood and then darkens and is assailed by smoke, dust, worms or moths). (2) Now, nothing is manifested in nature save the single-thing' (but previously every single-thing was a manifestation of the divine in the single-thing). (3) Hence nothing in nature can be beautiful, because the divine, which *must* be manifested as perpetual and permanent (in time, of course!), would have to be manifested as perpetual and permanent in the earthly to produce beauty, whereas in nature there is nothing but the single, and hence perishable thing. A splendid proof! Only it suffers from a few defects, of which we shall mention only two.

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Proposition no. 2 states that nothing is manifested in nature but the single-thing: previously, however, there were three things, which there is now nothing but the single-thing: (A) the divine, (B) the single-thing in which it was manifested and (C) that which arose out of this fusion, at once divine and earthly. But now this modest person, who shortly before was looking at his face in the mirror of the latest philosophy, quite forgets its shape. Of A, B and C he now sees only B, of which it is, of course, easy to prove that it is not the beautiful, since according to his own declaration C alone can be this. He will not now contradict himself by saying that C is not *manifested*; for he has already expressed a contrary opinion as to that too. For A (the divine) is not manifested *per se*, but only through the single-thing, B; that is, in C; precisely C, then, is the only thing really manifest.—The second defect consists in the conclusion, although it is only reached with a half degree of certainty, hardly as more than the demand of an interpolated incidental proposition, that the divine as such *would have to be* manifested as perpetual and permanent! Obviously this well-oriented man has confounded the notion of the in-itself, absolutely timeless eternal with the concept of that which is perpetual and infinitely permanent in time, and demands the latter when he ought to see the former. Now, if the divine can only be manifested in the infinitely abiding, let him see how he can demonstrate its manifestation in art, i.e. in a piece of artistic beauty.—It is inevitable that this thoroughly learned man will set to on some other occasion and, perhaps not without reason, reprove yet others for the misuse of the latest philosophy, through which geometrical progression of ever improved understanding every broadening knowledge is bound to develop, as may readily be seen.

⁸ As a matter of fact, the assertion that monuments of ancient art were available to the originators of the newer school of painting cannot be made in respect of the first or earliest of them. For, as the worthy *Fiorillo* expressly remarks in his *History of the Graphic Arts*, Vol. I, p. 69, no ancient paintings and statues had yet been discovered at the time of Cimabue and Giotto; they lay neglected beneath the ground. 'Hence no-one could think of training himself after the patterns bequeathed us by the ancients, and the sole object of study for painters was nature. One notices in the works of Giotto, a pupil of Cimabue, that he had already diligently consulted it.' Following his example, this path, which was able to prepare the way for and lead closer to the antique, was pursued until, as the same historian notes on p. 286, the house of Medici (namely

Appendix

with Cosimo) began to search for monuments of ancient art. 'Hitherto, artists had to content themselves with the beauties offered them by nature, nevertheless this assiduous observation had the advantage of preparing the way for a more scientific elaboration of art, and the subsequent philosophic artists, such as da Vinci and Michelangelo, began to investigate the fixed laws underlying natural phenomena.'—But even the re-discovery of ancient works of art during the time of these masters and that of Raphael in no way gave rise to their imitation in the sense that arose only at a later period. Art remained true to the path upon which it had embarked and reached consummation entirely out of itself; absorbing nothing from outside itself, but striving in its own particular way toward the goal of those prototypes, and only meeting with them at the ultimate point of consummation. Not until the time of the *Caracci* did imitation of the antique, which means something quite different to forming one's *own* taste according to its spirit, become an established principle and pass, particularly through *Poussin*, into the art theory of the French, who have an exclusively literal understanding of almost all the more exalted subjects. Thereupon the same practice became indigenous to us through Mengs and the mis-interpretation of Winkelmann's ideas, bringing upon German art of the middle of the last century such dullness and lack of spirit, with such forgetfulness of its original meaning, that even individual rebellions against it were mostly no more than misconceived emotion that led from one imitative mania to another worse one. Who can deny that a far freer and more original taste has recently shown itself again in German art, which, if all else conformed to it, would give grounds for great hopes and perhaps allow us to await the spirit which will open up in art the same lofty and free path that has been trodden in poetry and the sciences, and which alone could give rise to an art that we could truly call *ours*, i.e. an art of the spirit and of the energies of *our* nation and *our* age.

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